

# In The State of Holy Matrimony



S. Louise McDonogh

*A True Story*

# In The State of Holy Matrimony



*The Wedding Photo*

S. Louise McDonogh

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*To Abe Stuckey with love*



# Preface

This is the true story of two individuals, a Kiwi and an Australian, who collided in Matrimony. To many of those in a similar circumstance, the comments and situations will sound familiar. It is written as a contribution to the domestic history of New Zealand, not as a model of good sense and not as a guide.

# Foreword

We were off duty. Carson, Hogarth, Briggs, Kellman, Southwell and I had special privileges. We were relaxing in Matron Harrison's private upstairs flat, watching Matron's black and white TV. The program was Six O'Clock Rock. It was one of those raucous shows full of Go Go dancers, singers and a band.

The band was made up of geeky types, the most geekish being the drummer. "Look at the percussion section" observed Senior Nurse Carson. "Look at the drummer. Isn't he dopey looking?".

"I beg to differ, Carson" I responded, faking serious. "I like older drummers with thick glasses and facial hair".

"I didn't know that!" exclaimed Carson. "I'm going out at the moment with someone whose older brother has facial hair and glasses. I'm told he used to play the kettledrum. I could arrange a date and introduce you to him".

"Go on. Go on. Go on. GO ON!" chorused Hogarth, Briggs, Kellman and Southwell. I was trapped. Carson took another bite of her lamington. She looked me straight in the eye. "I dare you" she said.

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# 1

## Australia to New Zealand

1961. The three week whirlwind courtship began in the nurses quarters of St. Andrews Hospital in Brisbane on September 2nd and came to an abrupt end at St. Stephens Cathedral in Brisbane on September 23rd. Before the wedding, the Banns were waived by Archbishop Duhig, due to special circumstances. There was a brief rehearsal in the Sacristy. “To love, honour and obey”. Obey? Obey? The ‘obey’ word was deleted.

The Nuptial Mass was celebrated by a reluctant Father John Patrick Cleary. Somebody played the Wedding March on the gigantic pipe organ and voila! Here comes the bride. The groom was bespectacled, moustached Ian James McDonogh, thirty-two year-old Kiwi, chef and air-conditioning engineer, the image of the film star David Niven. I J was the first boy I ever kissed and he will most likely be the last.

Immediately following the wedding we went with our wedding guests for an impromptu wedding breakfast at the Colony Club Café. To the surprise of the staff there, the wedding group trooped in, seated themselves and ordered the wedding breakfast of their choice from the printed menu. The groom had toasted ham sandwiches and coffee. The bride ate waffles with cream and maple syrup. The bride's mother who was feeling poorly, sipped lemonade. Several nurses in the group took advantage of the free Colony Club tucker enthusiastically and the groom paid for everything.

The breakfast concluded, farewells were said, tears were shed and my new husband and I took a taxi to the South Brisbane railway station. The train went non-stop to Sydney and before I knew it I was on the ship the Arcadia, on my way to New Zealand. I was almost twenty-one years old and bore a resemblance to the film star Audrey Hepburn.

The Arcadia was a P&O cruise ship voyaging between Sydney and Auckland in the sixties, as part of a journey around the world from England. She had First Class, Second Class and Steerage. She was equipped with the very latest stabiliser tanks to keep her upright in stormy weather and high seas. The trip lasted three and a half days. A day out from Sydney the weather deteriorated and a storm hit. I thought I was going to die. I took to my bed in our cabin, pulled the sheets up over my head and stayed there until

we berthed in Auckland. While I was indisposed I J had to content himself writing letters in the First Class writing room and passing the hours in the First Class verandah café with several South African women who were fleeing apartheid in their homeland. Our arrival in Auckland was forgettable.

The next stop was the country town of Hawera, about 300 miles from Auckland, for the introduction to Ian James' father. Hector John McDonogh shook my hand like the gentleman he was. " My sons have deserted me" he confided. "Tis grim".

A thick-set balding man in his late sixties, Hector stood in the hallway of his shabby home surrounded by its dinginess and overgrown gardens, and rubbed his red rimmed eyes. His house was full of hundreds of old ticking clocks. Then, "I forgive you dear. For the war".

Later he offered a glass of tomato juice mixed with dried hydrangea root and ginger. "Drink it up dear. It will put hairs on your chest".

I looked at my new father-in-law. I looked long and hard. Hector, a driver in the First World War, was originally Church of England but he had 'turned' for his wife, formerly Mary Cecelia Goggin, a sturdy girl of Irish Catholic migrant stock from Kings Cross, Sydney, Australia.

Our stay in Hawera was short. We needed to return to Auckland to find work. Back in Auckland I wondered what

I had gotten into. What sort of a romance was this? What hair-brained scheme had led me to forsake my family, my friends and my career to go off with someone I barely knew, to another country?

My second day in Auckland was enlightening. I J arranged to see an associate and I was to meet him at the G P O (General Post Office) down at the bottom of Queen Street. I found the G P O and waited next to a girl about my own age, wearing a bum-freezer skirt and a blouse several sizes too small. “What’s ya rate? “she said.

I stared at her. “Pardon?”.

“Gizz a look”.

“Pardon?”.

She lifted her leg like a ballerina and I saw a ‘TEN QUID’ mark under her shoe. “Move on or I’ll scratch your eyes out!” she threatened. I noted her bird’s nest hair and long red fingernails. Moving on, I found a policeman further up Queen Street and reported the incident. “I was standing, minding my own business” I told him. “You can’t stand there, love” he said. “That’s Lizzie’s patch”. Apparently there were five prostitutes working the G P O area and I had been standing on Lizzie’s square of pavement. A patrol car took me back to Whittaker Place. I could have been scratched to death.

There we were, surrounded by strangers, renting an empty flat in Whittaker Place close to Flora McKenzie's whore house. We were there because it was cheap. Having only one pound thirteen shillings between us and not a penny in savings, a room at the South Pacific Hotel was not an option. We had no furniture, no floor coverings, no curtains. Fortunately I found employment quickly, folding paper dress patterns at Simplicity Patterns not far from Whittaker Place. The manager donated a big, strong wooden box. I J helped carry it to the flat. Have you ever tried to carry a big, strong wooden box through the crowded streets of Auckland, with a clumsy, awkward, flatfooted person on the other end?. That box was our first table with a checked cloth on top.

Practically penniless, we sat on the floor at the table and ate red jelly and boiled rice, and boiled rice and red jelly for one whole week. It was time to see Archbishop Liston for Confession. "I am sorry" I said. "I am truly sorry. I want an annulment please. I want to go home to Brisbane".

"Have faith. If you have faith, you believe and belief leads to understanding".

"Has the marriage been consummated?".

"Yes".

"You are married and you will stay married. Now kiss your ring and remember you are in the state of Holy Matrimony.

For your Penance say six Hail Mary's and pray for your spouse".

I left the Confessional. Pray for my spouse? Pray for my spouse?

I went back to the box. The future needed to be sorted with my new husband. "You may be able to get your old job back as Head Chef at the Ace of Clubs".

I J put his arms around me. "I only washed the plates".

"What do you mean, you only washed the plates?".

"I only washed the plates".

His body came close. He was grinning. "I only washed the plates".

"DON'T!".

October 22nd was my Twenty First birthday. We went on the launch the Baroona to Waiheke Island and ate cold, cooked chicken on the sand. It was a feast fit for a king. You couldn't really call it a feast. There was no bread and only one bottle of Lemon Squash between us. Ian McDonogh's birthday gift to me was not expensive, although later it cost him plenty.

Lucky for him, my husband was able to return to his former job at McAlpine Refrigeration in the Auckland suburb of Penrose. He worked long hours of overtime to

make extra money. Our financial situation began to improve rapidly. We moved to a tidy firm's cottage at Oranga not far from Penrose and I quit my job at Simplicity Patterns. McAlpines gave us the free use of the firm's truck and a grey striped kitten named Pinky. We repaired people's broken refrigerators to make extra money. Soon we bought our first car. It was a black Vanguard costing fifty pounds.

# 2

## **First Days and Babies**

A week prior to the birth of our daughter Jedda in mid-July of the following year, we sent my mother in Brisbane a plane ticket for herself and my four-year-old brother to visit us. In the September my sister from Brisbane came to stay. My mother lived in New Zealand for sixteen years before returning to Australia with my brother. She joined the angels in 1991. One night I dreamed of my mother. She was sitting in front of me in her old pink floral dress, on a wooden chair, suspended in mid-air with nothing in the background. She sat there quite alone, her hands folded on her lap. Back in time. Before the divorce. “Don’t worry about me. I wasn’t unhappy”. She spoke the words clearly and just as clearly I heard myself reply “Yes you were. I was there”. My mother did an extraordinary thing. She vanished.

With the birth of Jedda( the Aboriginal word meaning ‘Spirit Wind in the mountains’), I J had created his own

Purgatory of mashed banana baby food, squitty nappies and sleepless nights. He needed consolation. Firstly however, and top of my list of wants for any future breeding programme, was a home of our own. The peacock himself, Mr David Niven, had a rent mentality, a leftover from the previous generation. Coming from a privileged, comfortable Australian family with a rural background, I had no such mentality. How could I, I J's bird, his own little turtle dove, be expected to produce more offspring without a proper nest to put them in ? The answer was simple. I couldn't. I wanted a home like the people next door.

Gustafsons lived next door. Mr and Mrs Gustafson were nice refined folk who kept to themselves. Mr Gustafson was a do-it-yourselfer who loved carpentry. He always had projects on the go, building cupboards, changing doorways, making furniture. His son Barry, who lived with his parents, had a car to die for. It was a lemon coloured Morris with a soft top. Later on Barry went into Politics.

The Reverend Lesley Arnold lived in the Baptist Manse on the other side with his elderly mother, who was the most considerate, kindest soul you could ever hope to meet. She would come just before dinner, bringing jars of home-made yellow gooseberry jam. After dinner, in the evenings, I J and I would stroll along Rangipawa Road, with Jedda sitting like a princess in I J's Aunty Eileen's old cane Plunket pram.

People would stop to admire the baby and I J would grow a couple of inches taller each time.

During the day when I J was at McAlpines, I had nothing to do except play with our baby and teach her things. I'd spend hours on the floor playing with little plastic farmyard animals, home-made soft toys and wooden jigsaw puzzles. Our baby learned to speak quite early. By the time she was eighteen months old, she could hold a conversation and by the time she was two, she could talk the ears off a donkey. At age three, our daughter was having imaginary conversations with Gel, a make-believe child who lived under her bed. "Gel says I need kells" she'd say and I would obediently brush her fine silky blond hair into little ringlets, using a damp cloth. Love is a wispy curl.

Our first proper home was in Greenmeadows Avenue, Manurewa. We bought a brand new Paramount home on the largest section in the Greenmeadows sub-division. It cost a whopping two thousand seven hundred pounds, paid for with the help of a 3% Government Loan available to first home owners. Now that we had a sense of security I was ready to breed again. Phillip John McDonogh was not destined to become part of our family. There was a blood problem.

One day in 1964 we took Jedda and my brother Trevor to see the big elephant Jamuna at the Auckland Zoo. They

had their photos taken with their faces in a hole( where the face would have been) in the body of a concrete monkey and more photos taken on a concrete colourful dragon. Jamuna the Indian elephant was presented to the Auckland Zoo in 1923. She died in September 1965. During her lifetime she gave over 750,000 rides to children. She was believed to be fifty-eight years old when she died, a wonderful animal. The following year Walt Disney died and left children the legacy of Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Tom and Jerry, Goofey, Tweety Bird and a host of other cartoon characters.

John Patrick McDonogh was our miracle child. Paddy's birth at National Women's Hospital in March 1965 was an R.H. complicated one and a distressing time for all. When he finally came home he was such a good wee soul. No trouble. And he's been no trouble since.

Around Easter 1965, the parish priest of St Annes church. Father Kennefick, he of the soft persuasive Irish lilt, visited. He began his chat the way he began all of his chats with the young, blindly obedient wives of the parish, by reminding them of their duties to their husbands and of how wonderful it was to bring strong, happy, healthy children into the world and God would provide. It was nothing personal, but at that precise moment, I truly believed he had, like so many of his ilk, thrown down the gauntlet. "Nonsense" I declared. "God won't do anything of the sort. Silly Ian McDonogh will

be the one doing the providing and if its left to him, he'll produce a whole football team and drop dead".

"Wicked woman!".

"Your sheep have too much religion and not enough common -sense. They are the perpetrators of their own misery and the authors of their own destruction".

"No" I carried on, "I will not conform to your idea of a good wife. If poor Ian McDonogh doesn't like it, he can walk into the sunset".

"Wicked woman".

End of visit.

My sister understood. She had taken the giant leap of faith (or was it madness?) the previous year and married her own heart-throb.

The Ryan family lived next door on one side in Greenmeadows Avenue. A retired policeman George Urquhart and his wife Hilda lived on the other side with their son John. When John left Manurewa High School he bought a pale green Ford Anglia car, a real show-piece.

Our neighbours over the road were the Korewha family. They often had get-togethers for the extended whanau and the cuzzies from the Hokianga. One afternoon when a get-together was in full swing, I J saw the Korewha's black

Alsatian dog walk over the road, jump our front gate and pee on our grass. He was furious. “Go over the road and tell them to keep their dog at home!” he ordered. “No. You go”. (from me).

“No. You go. And tell them to stop the noise”.

“No. You go”.

“No. I said YOU GO” ( from he who must be obeyed ).

I walked across the road fully expecting to trigger World War Three.

“Hello” said Joe Korewha. “Come on in. Have a chicken wing”.

Strong arms propelled me through into the front room, where I found myself sucking on chicken wings and learning to play the guitar. I had a lovely time. Some of Joe’s friends were there to help him concrete his driveway.

In those days the home owners mixed their own concrete and poured their own driveways. Our driveway was twenty-two yards long and it nearly broke our backs. Next we constructed a sandpit and a paddling pool. Bubble pipes were popular. I J built a swing. He made kites and model aeroplanes.

At the end of Paddy’s first year we began to worry. Our son was toddling, getting into the normal sorts of mischief,

playing Peek-a-Boo games with his sister in big empty cardboard boxes, pulling the cat's tail, but he wouldn't talk. "Dat" he would say in his high-chair, pointing with his little, fat finger to the kitchen cupboard. Jedda his keeper, would interpret. "My baby wants cake. He wants it now. He says he is starving. Can't you see he is starving? He is starving for some cake". It was always the same, with the telepathy thing going on day after day. "Dat".

"My baby wants to go outside. He says he wants to sit on the grass beside me. He wants a teeny, weeny piece of cake. Or a jellybean".

They kept pressing my stress button. The poet in me stirred.....

*I looked into my girl child's eyes and saw within the limpid pools, the cunning of a maori dog. I looked into my boy child's eyes and saw in those compelling orbs, the scheming creature's only pup.*

Enough.

Please God, let our son speak. We took him to Doctor Kelly.

"Leave him alone" he advised. "There is nothing wrong with him. Why should he speak when your other one is chattering non-stop?".

The Red Letter Day came in July, a week after Jedda's fourth birthday. She ran into the kitchen, full of high glee.

“Come quick” she urged. “Paddy is in the cardboard box and he is talking”.

I swept my beautiful boy into my arms. His warm, fat, little fingers held my face. He raised his baby-fine eyebrows and he spoke to me. “More cake?”.

A reward was in order. I J built a full-sized playhouse that an adult could fit inside .There was a little table and four chairs for tea parties and a rope noose hanging in the corner to string up any dolls or teddies that misbehaved or didn’t mind their manners. Yesterday’s child within me eagerly consumed the yummy afternoon teas of chocolate crackles, pikelets and strawberry flavoured milk. Several teddies were operated on for stomach pains by Doctor Paddy and sick Monkey had his toes and ears fixed. The dolls had regular haircuts and lipstick applied by Miss Jeddah Bossy. She looked me straight in the eye.

“It wasn’t me . It was Paddy. Paddy did it”.

“Its naughty to tell lies”.

“Bum”.

“You mustn’t say “bum”. Bum is a rude word. Now who put the lipstick on the Barbie dolls’ mouths?”

“It was Paddy. The fairies made him do it”.

The day Jeddah began school at St Annes,Gel, the imaginary friend under her bed disappeared forever. I joined Paddy

in the Kindergarten Brigade, wresting with Plastercine, toy trains, tin soldiers, pet mice and wriggly worms in glass jars. Then Jedda told Paddy about the Boogey Man.

Gaylene at school had said the Boogey Man would come for him in the night with a sack and cart him off to Hell or somewhere with flames and he would be burnt to ashes. He began to have disturbed sleep and nightmares. What to do?. I sat down at the old Singer sewing machine and created a monstrous teddy bear stuffed with foam chips. Edward Bear the guardian angel, twice as big as his three-year-old owner, was tucked into bed beside him. The Boogey Man never visited our house again. Love conquers fear in the simplest ways.

Digressing a moment, I must take care to keep my story from fragmenting. It must not become disjointed. Yet disjointed is how my married life has been. And underlying the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the round-abouts, the giddy heights and the swirling lows, there is no denying the invisible cord that binds us to each other. Matrimony deals us a handful of cameos. We can cast them aside or make a necklace.



*Grand-dad Hector and Paddy*



*Jedda and the playhouse*



*My sister*

# 3

## Maureen

Sometimes the siblings squabbled. Who would switch on the Golden Knight TV? Who would carry the wire basket containing the empty milk bottles and the aluminium tokens to the gate post for the milkman? Who would carry the three tokens? Who was going to have first bath? Who was going to have last bath? Who was going to scrape the chocolate crackle bowl? “Its my turn”.

“No .Its mine!”.

Who would lick the spoon? “She licked it last time!”.

“Liar. Liar. Pants on fire!”.

My stress indicator light would flash. Lord save us from ourselves and two screeching ,wild cockatoos. I thought of the wild cockatoos of my childhood, flying free in the Australian Outback. These cockatoos were different. They were much bigger and they were right there in my kitchen.

I thought of my favourite English poet John Masefield.  
“Where are you, John?”.

“I must go down to the sea again. To the lonely sea and  
the sky”

“Please will you help me, John?”

“And all I need is a tall ship and a star to steer her by”.

The playhouse became my sanctuary.

Mrs McDonogh was eventually excluded from the playhouse. Entry was by written invitation only, signed by Miss Bossy. Call us quirky if you will, but we have never felt we had the right to discard our children’s toys. They were their possessions; not ours. They are still with us, including Monkey and the Snakes and Ladders games. Sometimes I J calls them junk.

Tucked away safely in the Family Bible, inherited from my other Grandmother, Mary Jane Joyce from Ireland, is more junk. Small, neatly written notes done in childish hand. One reads ‘Dear Mummy and Daddy, thank you for the red crayon. Thank you for the sixpence. I can buy another red crayon for Paddy. Love from your Jedda XXX. Another note reads ‘Dear Mummy. I love you. I am going to live in the jangle wiht Tarzan. I might come back. Xxxxx. Paddy’.

Our home in Greenmeadows Avenue had a large fireplace with a tiled surround. One winter’s evening the chips in the

fireplace failed to burn. “Out of my way” said I J holding a bottle of methylated spirits.”I’ll show you how to light a fire”. The explosion blackened the tiled surround, ruined the feature wall and badly scorched the drapes. “Gracious!” from my mother who had retreated to the kitchen, “You’ll burn the house down!”.

Shaking, I telephoned Maureen to tell her I had married a firebug.

“He almost incinerated my mother” I gibbered.

“None of us is perfect” she said.

Maureen is petite, blue eyed and brown haired with a sultry manner. She is convent educated, therefore she is knowledgeable. Her vocabulary is vast and her diction is perfect. She is a skilled operator of the sewing machine and she does fragile art and craft work with her hands. Hands she often refers to as Claws .She is resilient, she is generous and she does her own wallpapering.

In those early years, my best friend Maureen was my sanity and my salvation. We belonged to St Annes Catholic Church and that is where I first met Maureen, early on a rainy Sunday morning. We became friends instantly. It must have been the Irish in our genes. Our children attended St Annes convent school where we did our turn at tuckshop duties. There were days when I’d sit in Maureen’s kitchen

after school, to have sessions. Once I told her “Did you know I have married the biggest liar on the planet?”.

Slowly and deliberately Maureen stubbed out her half finished cigarette in the ashtray on the sink. “Yes” she said. “It is very sad”. Then, reflecting on her own undesirable lot, she lit another cigarette, inhaled deeply and puffed the deadly fumes. Staring out the window, blinking through the smoke, she coughed.

“I married a megaphone”.

Maureen and I liked to window shop. We liked to visit the large department stores in Auckland and watch a busy, energetic little man demonstrate and sell amazing kitchen gadgets, spring curler things for our hair, the latest stick-on rubber heels, retractable screw-drivers and much more to his enthralled audience. His name was Mr McCall and he was the greatest salesman in Queen Street. He made our lives worth living. There was one drawback. The buses to Auckland were infrequent. It was settled. I J would teach me to drive.

We drove to the country. “Its safer” said Driving Instructor McDonogh. There is a high bank at a corner on the road to Clarks Beach. “Change down” snapped the Instructor. “Down where?”

“Get your FOOT off the accelerator!”

“Don’t speak to ME like that!”

“You’re turning here. You’re TURNING!”

We hit the bank and crawled out of the upside-down Vanguard.

“You were doing a hundred”

“I was NOT!”. When one is learning to drive, one cannot be expected to do everything. We both found the mishap depressing when the reality of the situation hit us. Our second car was a pale blue Hillman Avenger. I didn’t like it. “Happy Mothers Day” said I J , hugging me too tightly in the front seat. Seated invisibly in the rear seat was Archbishop Liston. “Now kiss your ring” he said to me “and remember you are in the state of Holy Matrimony”.

During the twelve years we were in StAnnes parish, curates and priests came and went. Some were destined to become important. Others were transferred when their turn came, to different parishes to carry on the Lord’s work. And one or two just went altogether and found other channels for their lives. Who could forget Father Sharp with his thick prescription glasses, his Roman sandals, his guitar and his Bambina? The priest who stays in my mind is the long haired Jesus look-alike in his black cassock. I wonder if he remembers me? I wonder if he remembers Jedda? She was doing well at school; best for morning talks, keeper of the library cupboard key, leader of the reading group. Coming home with all sorts of stories. There was one particular

occasion when I J was not a good listener. Jeddha had come home from school later than usual. I J was very angry. “You’re not going to believe a kid, are you? Kids are always making things up” he said. I told Maureen. In hindsight, I should have told the Bishop.

Shortly after the church hall was built behind the classrooms at St Annes, the Parish Council decided to hold a fund raising concert. On concert night the hall was overflowing with parishioners. Old Father Kennefick was at his convivial best. A group of nuns from St Marys arrived, accompanied by a pretty dark haired girl. She wore a pink frothy dress and seemed a little nervous. Sister Mary Leo, a music teacher from St Mary’s School of Music, well known for her singing protégé seated herself in the row behind us.

As the young girl began singing, Sister Mary Leo tapped my shoulder and whispered “When the song is ended, please clap your encouragement”. So we did. The whole audience, led by the ladies of the Catholic Women’s League, gave the girl a standing ovation. Her name was Kiri Te Kanawa.

On a more personal note, the wine and cheese evening held at the Te Unga Waka marae was less enjoyable. The V.I.P. guest was the Catholic Bishop of Auckland, the Most Reverend R J Delargy. Present were the clergy and the faithful colourful laity. Over in the far corner a group of the faithful stood, nibbling cheese and biscuits. There was

a fair amount of religious fervour evident and I felt as if I was amongst aliens. The Bishop approached, extending his hand. I J nudged me in the ribs and mumbled “Curtsy. Kiss the ring. Kiss the ring”.

“Are you mad?!”

Beside me, I J made choking noises in his throat. He could scarcely speak.

“I am so sorry, Your Grace. My wife is a convert”. His Grace fixed me with his X ray eyes, searching for any sign of horns and moved on. Des Piggin our trusted solicitor, sidled up to I J, wine glass in hand. “Had she been born in another era, she would have been burned at the stake”. Solicitors are full of arrant nonsense.

April 10th 1968 was the day the Interisland ferry the Wahine went down in Wellington harbour with the loss of fifty-one lives. We listened to the news reports and watched the drama unfold on T V. Newspapers and television kept us in touch with the whole world. (In July 1969, readers received a four page colour pull-out section with their New Zealand Herald. The Moon Beneath Their Feet. Man Lands on the Moon. There was astronautical jargon and space comment in screeds in the daily newspapers. The possibility of discovering faraway planets and extraterrestrial ‘beings’ grabbed our imagination. I J thought he saw a ‘being’ in our back yard).

# 4

## Holidays and Work

Merry Christmas 1968. Christmas meant lots of Christmas cards. There was one particular card addressed simply, McDonogh. Inside it was signed Stella. Stella who? Was she South African? Had she been on the Arcadia? Was something sinful going on? Should I confront I J? I had no evidence. My heart began pounding. Surely this was a card wrongly addressed, put there by mistake. Maybe Stella was short for Stella Nova the racehorse. Maybe it was a Code Name. Maybe there was a plan to get rid of me. Was Ian McDonogh secretly married to somebody else? Was the non-drinker, non-smoker too good to be true? I dialled her number. “What will I do, Maureen?”.

There was a two second silence. “Poison” she said. I made a cup of coffee and thought about it. I put a record on the old La Gloria radiogram. Johnny Cash sang ‘I Walk the Line’ and restored my faith in men.

The first Sunday of the New Year, at the conclusion of Mass, we met Rod Finlayson ( the image of my Grandfather, Abraham Stuckey ) and his son Dennis outside St Annes Church. The conversation turned to ‘the card’. Rod, a stooped elderly writer of books, squeezed my arm. “How intriguing. You should write a book”. I digested the thought. Maybe next summer.

Weekends in the summer were spent at Weymouth beach, ten minutes from home. We’d drive from Manurewa and enjoy a picnic lunch on the sand. Jedda and Paddy would rush about shrieking, chasing the seagulls. The seagulls shrieked back. It was great fun. We took lots of photos with the Kodak camera. Weymouth beach was deserted in those days. You could buy a huge ice-cream in a cone for ten cents from Mr Whippy, the mobile ice-cream vendor. Decimal currency had been introduced the previous year. Returning home, two tired, happy youngsters would have their hair shampooed and a bath. Togs were washed, followed by the ritual of counting shells, cleaning the toy wooden boats and putting the sand castle buckets and spades away safely until next time. Pinecones and driftwood were squirreled in the garden shed for winter.

1969. According to an old diary which has survived house moves, fires and dogs’ teeth, the American evangelist Dr Billy Graham held his Crusade at Western Springs Stadium in

February 1969. He poured his fiery oratory onto thousands of Aucklanders and onto hundreds more from around the region, anxious to hear what credentials they needed to enter the Pearly Gates and claim their rightful place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Opponents of the Crusade called it ‘the conning of the masses’. According to the diary I didn’t attend the Crusade. It wasn’t my scene. However, we mustn’t be judgemental. We are all pilgrims, each trying to make a little progress, one way or another.

As the children grew older they craved entertainment. We’d take them to the Odeon, the St James and the Civic theatres in Auckland, to see the latest Pink Panther films. The Pink Panther almost became a cult figure. The worshipers had to have a big stuffed Pink Panther soft toy. Panther is still with us. He reclines in a large old Plunket pram in the barn, beside Edward Bear.

Sports played an important role in our children’s lives. There were activities to help them grow into well-rounded adults. Netball, swimming, soccer and wrestling. To broaden their education, I J took them both overseas to Fiji. They went to Australia. Lots of kids never got the opportunity to travel. We would skimp and save to make it happen. Every second school holidays they would go with me, touring around the country in my car, eating take-away food, sleeping in the pup tent or in caravan parks, tramping, sight-seeing, exploring

rivers and rock collecting. We'd mark off sections on the map. We met owners of painted psychedelic vans, offering excursions at reasonable rates. The overseas tourists lapped it up.

One time on holidays, meandering in the Tolega Bay area past Gisborne, we found ourselves in a paddock of long grass on a hill. A barbed wire fence separated us from another paddock of long grass which contained a poor sick Hereford bull. It was all alone standing by a fence post, rubbing its poor sore head against the wire. It was moaning in agony and dribbling at the mouth. Did it have an abscessed tooth? Did it have ear ache? There was a patch of bare earth where it had been rolling around in pain. What to do?

We retraced our steps half a mile to the Morris Minor and took the water container and a plastic bowl back to the sick animal. Paddy poured the water into the bowl and Jedda pushed the bowl under the fence. The bull didn't like the water. We coaxed and coaxed, but it wouldn't drink. It began shuddering, foaming at the mouth and bellowing with its head held low. There was nothing more to be done. We would have to get help. It was urgent. The S.P.C.A. is never there when you need them. We drove to a farm some distance away, where we met a farmer on a tractor. Imagine our surprise when we explained about the bull and he told us "Don't go messing with old Harvey Wallbanger. He's

breaking his neck to get at the cows on the other side of the hill". We had almost gone into the meat grinder.

1969 was a very good year. Laid up in distress under a peach tree, in an old fellow's back yard in Russell Road, parallel with the Great South Road, we discovered a dilapidated Baby Austin Seven 1936 car. Bridget, my very own car, cost forty dollars. She was the key to a big, wide world of travel. The engine was totally seized and the tyres were perished, but she was quite good in other ways. She had seats, two running boards and the original Owners Manual. Running boards are the side pieces you step up onto, to climb into the car.



*Bridget, my first car.*

We towed Bridget home behind the McAlpine truck and spent six months on a full restoration. My job was making a new hood lining and seat covers. When we had completed the structural repairs and rebuilt the engine, I J spray painted her pale green, not British Racing Green, the original colour of Baby Austin Sevens. Then we polished the chrome work and blackened the tyres. I can still remember the number plate. It was BB2346. I took her for a run over the Brynderwys and all the way to Dargaville.

About the same time Maureen got a Wolsley. We were up and away, blatting around the streets of Manurewa. To broaden our skills, we enrolled in the Evening Class at the new James Cook High School. There were several subjects to choose from; typing for beginners, pottery, cooking, macramé, woodwork, art and public speaking. We chose woodwork. On Opening Night the woodwork teacher was perplexed. There were two females in his class. He wanted us to make a wooden tray. We didn't want to make a tray. Maureen wanted to make a coffee table and I had my heart set on making a hanging bookcase.

Maureen spent three terms constructing her coffee table. It began as a large table but became smaller as time passed. The legs wouldn't fit. I've never said anything to Maureen for fear of hurting her feelings, but her leaning table was never any good. My bookcase became the woodwork teacher's worst nightmare. The shelves were quite alright but the holes

that the dowels go through, got marked and drilled in the wrong place. When the whole unit was assembled it looked crooked and its looked crooked ever since. Crookedness is applauded these days.

1970. Paddy began school at St Annes convent school in the March. “My husband thinks he is not as clever as his sister” I told the Principal, Sister Virgilius . “Don’t worry” she sought to reassure me, ruffling Paddy’s perfectly combed hair. “Oh Lord. Will you look at his big brown eyes. The little girls will love him”. And they did.

Also in March 1970, a perpetually grinning activist student Tim Shadbolt said “Bullshit” and a few other choice words to a group of Auckland students and got himself arrested. The police dealt with him. He went to jail for using indecent language after refusing to pay the fine. When I was a young girl, the police had more important jobs to do. If you said bad words, your own mother would wash your mouth out with Sunlight soap. And if you then stamped your feet and called your mother ‘a silly thing’, you would get a belting with her wooden hair brush. You never called your mother ‘a silly thing’ ever again. It was a great saving in police time and valuable lessons were learned at home, not the least of which was, respect for your elders. School was not the only place for learning.

Paddy settled in happily in the Primer class at St Annes. Extra funds were needed for piano lessons for Jedda. Van

den Brinks poultry farm at Takanini advertised for egg collectors part-time. Off I went to be an egg collector. Two years pushing a wire cart through chook muck under rows and rows of squawking, fighting, feather-plucked hens producing endless eggs under artificial light. Two years of breathing dust and stink. The jobs we do for money. I was lucky I had Bridget for transport. I wouldn't have gotten the job if I hadn't had my own transport.

In September 1972 I loaned Bridget to my sister and afterwards she sold my darling car. I loved my little Austin Seven. If I could find Bridget I'd buy her back, just for sentimental reasons. My next car was a Morris Minor and my next job was as a machinist at Youthcraft in Manurewa . Once again, with the children in mind, I chose to work part-time. It was a job with a bonus system, so if you sewed fast, you could make extra money. We needed the money to have Jedda's teeth straightened. Could you imagine Nicole Kidman with crooked teeth?

All good things come to an end and it happened six months later, after the teeth straightening. This particular day, Muriel Henry and Rona Walker, whose schoolboy son could run really fast, were busy sewing sample garments, when the Supervisor did her usual slow walk down the aisles between the machines to inspect our work. She singled out the new learner girl on the machine behind mine. The Supervisor made her cry. Her hands were shaking badly. She

wasn't sewing fast enough. I felt so aweful. The Supervisor had made the new girl cry the previous day. What could I do? I faced the Supervisor. "I have never worked in a place where the management/worker relations are so low". Then I switched off my machine and left the building. I never returned. When I told I J what had happened, he said I'd done the right thing. Sometimes I think of that unhappy girl. Maybe she got to be a fast machinist and made lots of money for her two small daughters. I wish I'd kept in touch.

When Paddy was six years old we bought him his first bike. He wanted to ride his bike to school with Jeddah. I wasn't too keen on the idea, as they had to ride along the Great South Road to get to St Annes school. There was a steady flow of traffic. I made a big white cardboard sign with an 'L' in black and Paddy wore it reluctantly on his back, for the first six months biking to school. We expected ridicule or bullying by Paddy's classmates, but Jeddah was protective. "If anyone says anything to Paddy, me and Gaylene will fix them". No-one said anything. Other children began wearing 'Ls' to school.

One rainy afternoon, biking home from school along the Great South Road, Paddy was threatened by a dog that had left its property and wandered onto the footpath. The dog rushed at his bike, snapping at the front wheel, causing him to lose control, veer into the centre of the road and fall.

Only the quick thinking of the motorist prevented a serious, if not fatal accident. The driver had seen the boy on the bike, the boy with the ‘L’ on his back and the driver was being extra vigilant and careful. Thankfully our son was not injured but he had a problem to overcome. He was terrified of dogs.

We took Paddy to Doctor Kelly. Kelly leaned forward in his chair and tapped his pencil on the desk. “Get him a pup” he suggested brusquely. There were no pups. We bought a hysterical spaniel/foxie dog named Trixie. She snapped and snarled and did wees everywhere. In the end she didn’t fit in. ( I’ll explain later).

Brownie, the little Cardigan Welsh Corgi puppy won our hearts. We had visited the S.P.C.A. dog pound at Drury. There were numerous dogs awaiting adoption. The noise was deafening. Inside the entrance to the office, against the wall, was a wire carry -cage containing a whimpering, shivering puppy. Enquiries revealed it was a corgi puppy surrendered by a breeder who had an outbreak of ringworm in his kennels. The puppy was for destruction. “I’m sorry” said the S.P.C.A lady in the white coat to my children . “ The vet is coming to put the puppy to sleep. You can have any other dog but not that little one. He is diseased”.

Jedda glared at the lady. “I know what ‘put to sleep’ means” she announced. “It means you are going to kill the poor little thing”. Paddy began to cry.

“It needs me” he blubbed.

“Oh come on” I said. “ We can look at some other dogs”

“No! We want THAT one!” persisted Jedda.

“THAT one” blubbed Paddy. The lady in the white coat began to fidget. I decided to put pressure on the lady and I J contributed his two cent’s worth. Jedda kept insisting the S.P.C.A. were murderers and Paddy sat down on the floor. He was inconsolable. Just then, a van pulled into the parking space outside the main doors. It was the vet. All Hell broke loose.

After lengthy negotiations and a commitment from me to wash the corgi puppy three times a day with special medicated shampoo and apply foul-smelling ointment using disposable rubber gloves, the lady relieved I J of a substantial sum of money, made us promise not to tell her superiors and released the puppy to us with his cage. Brownie was ours. We had saved the poor little chap. At home we made an important discovery. Brownie was a ‘she’.

Having deliberately sacrificed my income from Youthcraft, I needed another job. It was at the mail desk at FibreMakers (NZ) Limited at Wiri. FibreMakers was a company engaged in the production of synthetic yarn. When I think of my job at FibreMakers. I think of Lorna my second best friend, a younger, much slimmer version of Betty Turpin from Coronation Street. We shared duties at the mail desk. Lorna

was very good at Crosswords and Scrabble. She had a very highly developed sense of humour. She could make me laugh at practically anything. Her favourite antic was to pull the sides of her eyes up with her fingers to make herself look like a Chinese person. This was done behind the Company Secretary's back as he walked away from the mail desk. Another antic was folding her lips inside her mouth like a chimpanzee and wobbling her head about, done for the benefit of the Accountant.

After some time as mail clerk, I was offered a generous clothing allowance and promotion to the position of Fabric Librarian. This entailed a transfer from the mail desk upstairs to a place in the fabric library downstairs, where I spent my days in a tiny room, cataloguing fabric samples, filing fashion releases from overseas fashion houses and acting as general dog's body to Margot Bolt, one of FibreMaker's most important employees.

Green-eyed, prematurely grey haired, elegant, slim Margot who looked as though she had stepped from the pages of a Vogue magazine, was in charge of the FibreMaker's fashion shows. She would hire the models from the model agencies and organise trade shows to promote the Company product. We travelled to centres as far away as Dunedin. It was an exciting time. My job was to hover in the background and dress and redress the models in the blink of an eye, ready for the music and the catwalk.

Margot was witty and scintillating at the after-trade show functions. She would encourage me to come over all ‘glam’ for any prospective clients. I’d hob-nob and pretend to be someone I’m not. When in Rome, be a Roman. The rag trade was so artificial; full of silly lecherous old men and big red-mouthed, sparkling, glittering, over-the-hill women, desperately trying to look visually appealing. Isn’t booze wonderful? Or you could gas yourself on their cigarette and cigar smoke. Fashion releases showed the latest styles for the dedicated followers of fashion. Peplums and tabards were ‘in’; also polyester prints.

Having access to the new season’s fashion sketches in the fabric library, I’d copy the latest youthful trends for Jedda ; cross-over blouses and can -can skirts. Her favourite garment was a lavender blue velvet bomber jacket. Margot would donate large fabric samples to the cause. The samples came to FibreMakers from the wholesale suppliers. Margot also donated a recipe for Rice Whisky.

### ***You will need***

*3 lbs of short grain rice                    1 lb of raisins*

*3 lbs of sugar                                Juice of one lemon*

*8 pints of warm water                    1 ounce of yeast*

### ***Method***

- *Put rice, chopped raisins, sugar, lemon juice and water into a large receptacle*

- Add the yeast first dissolved in a little warm water
- Let the mixture stand with a cloth for 12 days NB. Stir occasionally for first three days
- See that the receptacle is kept in a warm place like a cupboard under the stairs
- Do not remove the scum until the last day
- Using several thicknesses of muslin, strain the mixture into a large container
- Filter the strained liquid into clean stone jars NB. Use clean dry egg shells finely crushed to clarify the brew
- Cork and store for six months in a cool place such as a concrete basement
- Re-filter and bottle
- Store for a further six months
- Rice Whisky is similar in taste, colour and potency to Jack Daniels
- Warning. Consumption may de-enamel the teeth and harm the gums.
- Drink through a straw

Although I enjoyed being Fabric Librarian at FibreMakers and the money was good, I missed Lorna. I had made a huge mistake and there was no going back. I should never have left the mail desk. I wish I'd kept in touch with Lorna to have a laugh for old time's sake. In the words of the famous

Scottish author Thomas Carlyle, ‘The realm of silence is large enough beyond the grave’.

Once or twice or possibly more times, after a very funny day at FibreMakers, I J and I would retire to bed early and I’d relate little incidents that had happened at work, to make my bedmate laugh. He’d laugh and chuckle and chuckle and laugh until I could suffer him no longer. Then he would do the unthinkable. He would encroach onto my side of the bed. Such are the ways of married life. Such are the joys in the state of Holy Matrimony. It is a well known fact, male bed mates can become excitable over less than nothing and female bed mates can become tetchy for no reason at all. Cold was the air and long was the night, I took my guilt and sat by myself on a rock at Weymouth beach.

# 5

## Family

In the FibreMakers days, once a month on Sundays, we would have a visit from I J's bachelor uncle, Uncle Ron. Big Ron, as he was known, had been Head Barman at the Central Hotel in Auckland in the mid 1940s. He had made his fortune by loaning sums of money at very high interest rates, to the visiting American troops during the Second World War. According to Ron, there was a group of Japanese living in secret in the Ureweras. Apparently they sneaked in during the war and nobody noticed.(except perhaps, the Sisters of St Josephs Convent School in Hawera).

Uncle Ron would come on the bus from Auckland just before lunch. He would sit down to a roast dinner, plus baked apples, ice-cream and custard. "I'm not a big eater, dear" he'd say, then swallow enough to fill an elephant. The afternoons were spent listening to our guest reminisce about his travels around the world and the fascinating folk

he had met. He liked to put the spotlight on himself. My aching face would be set in a concrete smile and my brain would be saying “Will it be O K if I stop smiling now?” I J said I looked cuckoo. At 4pm, afternoon tea over, I J would get the car out and drive Uncle Ron home to his blocks of flats in Dominion Road. I didn’t mind Uncle Ron visiting. He would bring me Gerbra plants for the garden. I J called his uncle a boring old fart.

I shouldn’t criticise, but Uncle Ron did have a mean streak. One Sunday after he’d eaten my food, Jedda and Paddy approached him for a donation to the St Annes School Mission Fund. They were having a collection for the black babies in Africa. “No” said Ron.

“Why not?” Jedda wanted to know.

“Why not?” ventured Paddy the echo.

“Well. There’s them and there’s us” Ron replied and launched into a ten-minute rant on how you can’t help some people because they are beyond help. In the long run its best just to help yourself and not get involved in other people’s lives. They will drag you down and make you unsuccessful. Then to help them succeed, he gave my lovely offspring a shilling each for their piggy banks. “Thankyou Uncle Ron” they chorused, like a couple of parrots. When Ron had gone Jedda opined Uncle Ron was a dumb-cluck, Paddy agreed

and they put their shillings in the envelope for the black babies.

To tell the truth , I'm not certain how much money the black babies received from St Annes. Maureen's Maria came home one afternoon and told her mother that Sister Germaine had taken the money from the Mission box and sent Maria's classmate to the Weymouth dairy across the road, to buy chocolates. Sister told the class, if they were good children and behaved, God would love them and she, Sister Germaine would pick the best pupil each day and that pupil would be given a chocolate.

Sister kept the chocolates in a brown paper bag in her desk. Although the Standard Twos stayed on their best behaviour for one whole month, no-one ever got a chocolate. Maureen's Maria said it wasn't fair. Sister was a miserly, mingy fat heifer of a nun who scoffed the lot and wouldn't share. She just helped herself. Evidently Sister Germaine practised the Gospel according to Ron.

Ron never tired of telling us how, like his Great Uncle before him, he had donated considerable funds to the McDonogh University in Maryland in the United States of America. He told us conscience got to him for ripping off the Yankee boys at the Central Hotel.

The mystery of how and why the McDonoghs from Ireland ended up in America has never been fully investigated.

McDonogh is a common enough Irish name. It is unclear whether certain daft little Irishmen couldn't spell their name or whether factions of the clan put an 'a' instead of an 'o' after a fight over bags of potatoes and decided to live somewhere else. It is probable their enemies followed them.

Much later, history reveals in 1916, at the conclusion of the Easter Rising, Thomas MacDonogh (poor speller) one of I J's forebears, was executed by the British. You may recall the Black and Tans and the Sinn Fein rebellion. The shame of it was too much for a few of the relatives and they too, migrated to Canada and the United States of America. Earlier, one of the McDonogh lads whose future looked fairly bleak, came to New Zealand by mistake. He fathered a builder, a strange lass who became a Carmelite nun, four marriageable colleens, the Chairman of the Nelson Racing Club and two walking distilleries.

We have an Eire postage stamp in our stamp album, depicting the late Thomas MacDonogh. A stamp is the only evidence of the McDonogh claim to fame in New Zealand. A tiny scrap of paper with a fanatical face on it, closely resembling I J.

Back to the FibreMaker days. On alternate Sundays we would be visited by I J's little dumpty Aunty Nell. She would come on the bus from Auckland, just before lunch. Aunty

Nell talked incessantly. She was very switched on, changing from one subject to another. Sometimes I would almost nod off to sleep in an hypnotic trance, but it didn't concern her. I think she was lonely.

Aunty Nell was a battler and she had style. Although she had gallbladder trouble and bad arthritis, she never complained. She would knit beautiful ,soft jumpers and hats with pom-poms for Jedda and Paddy. At 4pm, afternoon tea over , I J would get the car out and drive her home to her small flat in Mt Eden Road. It was a terribly sad day when we heard the news. The caretaker of the flats found our dearest Aunty Nell with her blue rinsed hair, sitting up in her bed one morning, wearing her mauve lace bedjacket. Her breakfast tray was on her lap. Death had come and kissed her.

1972 was the year we raised the house and built a flat underneath for Grand-dad Hector. One Sunday at Mass, soon after the completion of the downstairs flat, the call went out. Accommodation was needed urgently. We responded. A hard working Chilean refugee family with nowhere to stay and having only the intangible asset of goodwill, made use of the flat for a few months, until they were able to get on their feet financially and make a new life for themselves in New Zealand. We knew what it was like to have nothing. We learned a lot from our Chilean friends who spoke very little English. Sign language became a first rate comedy act.

On my birthday, my favourite New Zealand poet James K Baxter died of a heart attack. He was 46. It was a ahock. When the Chileans moved on, Grand-dad Hector and his clocks came to stay. He was a lonely man without his wife Dolly. Mary Cecelia McDonogh died on September 20th 1961, three days before our wedding. That was a much greater shock.

The young McDonoghs grew up on a diet of the Muppets, Tarzan, Sesame Street, Thunderbirds, Dr Who and the Six Million Dollar Man. We watched the Rolfe Harris Show on T V in 1972. Later, delusional and convinced that I was an artist of the calibre of Rolfe Harris, I entered a painting of a church in the Waihi Art Festival and was awarded a Highly Commended certificate for my trouble. I J was disappointed. He was adamant I would have won if I hadn't put black on the horizon. When you are an artist, you can put black wherever you want. There are no rules. I J is so pedantic. As for not winning, the subject matter of my painting might have upset the judge. He/she could have been a lapsed Catholic.

During the Christmas holidays 1972, we took Jeddah and Paddy to see Kashin, the new three-year-old Indian elephant at the Auckland Zoo. Kashin had arrived from Bangkok to be company for Ma Shwe, the eight-year-old resident Indian elephant. When the novelty of Kashin wore off, the pair fed a banana to Sally the chimpanzee, spoke to John the giraffe, saw Dot the zebra, Fred the baby puma,

plus the polar bears, lions, hippopotamuses, the baboon, a wallaby, Baba the camel, the leopard, the flamingos, seals, hedgehogs, snakes and turtles. And the peacocks, parrots and lizards. The adventurers rode on the miniature steam train. They dragged us around every enclosure and they wouldn't let us sit down. We must have walked miles. Then they had to have toffee apples, fairy cakes and creaming soda. And a hot meat pie. They nearly killed us.

Inspired by the miniature steam train at the Zoo, I J built Paddy a Go Cart. It was constructed of tubular steel and powered by a Villiers engine. The double de-clutch and braking system was quite complicated for a boy of seven to manage, but Paddy handled it well. The same could not be said of my mother who was persuaded to 'have a go' by I J. She climbed on board, strapped herself in, opened the throttle full on, revved the powerful engine, released the handbrake and took off across the lawn at great speed. My mother, who had never held a Driver's Licence or been behind the wheel of a moving vehicle in her entire life, was suddenly in charge of one hundred and fifty pounds of roaring, moving metal.

She came to a halt in the garden after sideswiping the fence and destroying four ornamental shrubs. I J almost died laughing. (He can be very childish). Fortunately my mother was unhurt. She never drove again. She chose quieter pursuits like cleaning the windows and polishing the

furniture. My mother became a cleaning freak. She cleaned the windows until she mesmerised herself with her own reflection and Paddy got the measles.



*My Mother in the Villiers Go-Cart*

From time to time I would unlock the old oak china cabinet with the leadlight doors. The contents, the tangible roots, would be carefully removed and placed on the dining room table, one by one. Jedda and Paddy would listen intently as my mother explained the significance of the pieces. These were the treasures from another era; keepsakes to be handed on to the next generation and the following generation and the one after that. The dainty silver engraved pocket watch with its enamelled face and painted flowers, a gift to my Grandmother's mother on her wedding day, from her husband Edward Valentine Steele.

There were delicate ivory fans, silver button-hoops, and pudding dolls lovingly handed down through the girls of the family. There were postcards from the First World War sent home by the Stuckey brothers who never returned. (The Stuckeys were Bankers in England); old photographs of long gone relatives in fashionable clothes, little celluloid animals from a Nativity scene, porcelain figurines and small leather-bound books given as prizes for attendance at Sunday School. My mother's tiny sterling silver purse. Memories are made of these. Or have we been mistaken? Does it matter any more?

Children remember the strangest things. "Once while we were at school and Mummy was at FibreMakers, Grand-dad Hector in the flat, let Trixie the dog go upstairs. Trixie savaged Mummy's Elladine. She tore her real hair and chewed her arms and legs. Then she smashed her face and her brown glass eyes. And she ripped the wedding photo". Naughty Grand-dad Hector. Trixie was relocated to a country home.

After Trixie came Brownie, as you already know. She could not be shown at dog shows. She had no pedigree papers. After Brownie came Ruby (Morag of Tibbermuir), our first pedigree Pembroke Welsh Corgi. Ruby was the fat foundation of our kennels. She never became a Champion. She wasn't good enough. But we can trace her pedigree right back in a direct line to Rozavel Golden Eagle, the first young corgi

acquired by H,M, King George the Sixth, whose affection for the breed is equalled by that of Queen Elizabeth the Second. So there is a bit of skite value there for I J, when he feels like skiting.

Less than six months after Ruby's arrival, wouldn't you know it, I contracted the disease Dollus Collectus, the forerunner of that other disease Compulsive Collecting Disorder. I discussed my disease with Maureen. "What if a little girl comes to me one day and wants a doll in a pram and there are no dolls?".

"Exactly" she said. "You can never have too many dolls".

"I J says the dolls are a major nuisance and a trap".

"What would he know?".

"Indeed".

"Tell Ian McDonogh to remember when we were at school they taught us, each one of us has an Extra Cross to bear"

Good news. An Extra Cross to bear. ( I J told me that all he had learned from the nuns at St Josephs in Hawera, was the Catechism and Beware the Yellow Peril). I would remind him about the Extra Cross.

In February 1973, the Rolling Stones performed at Western Springs Stadium. The front-man was tousled haired Michael Philip Jagger, prancing around the stage. "He's a heck of a player", a weirdo next to me giggled. And he was. Phil

Warren was impressed. He used his entrepreneurial skills in an attempt to persuade the Manager of Elvis Presley, Colonel Tom Parker, to bring the Super Star singing sensation to New Zealand. Nothing came of it. We knew Phil from the dogs shows where he exhibited his wife's West Highland Terriers and wore a silly ridiculous golf cap. Elvis didn't appeal to me but my sister might have been eager to see him.

I can remember the first time we saw a picture of Elvis. It was full-length on the front page of the Brisbane Telegraph in 1955. I was fifteen and my sister was almost thirteen. The headlines stated LOCK UP YOUR DAUGHTERS. ELVIS THE PELVIS A DANGER. Our father snatched the newspaper from my sister and tore it to shreds. My sister became a dedicated fan of Elvis. As a teenager she was right into Elvis regalia. She had a specially made studded belt that she wore skin-tight with a black swishy skirt and a purple shirt with a turned-up collar at the back to accentuate her heart shaped ear-rings. Around her neck hung a big chunky dog chain. Attached, was a big dog tag with the word 'ELVIS' engraved on it. She had a guitar with mother-of-pearl decoration. My sister could sing. She was the darling of the district. She was the Aspley Queen of Rock.

Back to the story. I J remained at McAlpines. Occasionally he did call-outs to solve refrigeration problems on container ships at Auckland Wharf. Once in appreciation of his services, he was invited on board with his wife, to join the Captain of



*“Goodnight Irene”*

a ship, for an evening of chit-chat and light entertainment. I wore my Hollywood shoes and I J reeking of cologne, wore his fawn jacket. A jolly time was had by all. At 1.00am, refrigeration engineer I J McDonogh slightly tipsy, praised the Captain for his hospitality and we prepared to leave. Coming down the gang-plank the engineer stumbled and reached for the handrail. It wasn't there. Before his wife's own eyes, he stepped over the side and went into the harbour. The Captain called “Goodnight Irene!”.

When they fished him from the water, I J adopted a supercilious attitude. He refused to say thank you. “My name is NOT Irene!”.

September 1973. I J had a special job to do for the Company. He was signed on, on the container ship the Act 2, as Supernumerary Engineer to monitor six hundred and thirty-six deck refrigerated containers with the new clip-on mode, containing frozen lamb, butter and cheese. The cargo was destined for Continental Europe via Belguim and London.

At Belguim the deck cargo was unloaded. The trip to London concluded ten weeks at sea, longer than usual due to the oil hike. Oil was conserved by slowing down on the voyage across the Atlantic. In London, I J had other duties to perform for the Company before resuming his travels, flying to New York, Los Angeles, Honolulu and Nandi, before returning home in January 1974. In his absence we ate many take-away meals and went shopping. Some of us are not attracted to the art of cooking.

My spouse came home laden with gifts for his children; baskets of Belguim chocolates, toys and books. He brought a broach and some other baubles for me. My sister, mother of three, had become disenchanted with her spouse. She divorced him.

1974 was our Annus Horribilis. Brownie had grown into a healthy, friendly obedient dog. She loved to play games. A favourite game was 'dead duck'. She would romp around the back yard which was fully enclosed and let the two duck

shooters (Jedda and Paddy) pretend to stalk her. Minutes into the game, one of the duck shooters would point a gun-finger at her and shout “Bang! Dead duck!”. Brownie would collapse on the spot, roll on her back, eyes shut, tail quivering with excitement. She would remain in position until the other duck shooter knelt beside her. “Poor Duckie. Duckie all better”, whereupon she would leap up and begin the game over again.

We will never forget the day when Brownie was almost three years old. I J and I were at work. Jedda and Paddy were at school. Grand-dad Hector was home alone. He absentmindedly left the side gate open and our beautiful Brownie followed Korewha’s dog to the Mahia railway crossing. Both dogs were playing on the tracks when the train went through. Only one dog returned We searched and searched. A friend who lived near the crossing , phoned in the evening. “Bring a sack”. It was very sudden. We vowed we would never have another dog.

Jedda’s final year, 1975, at St Annes was not good. Her teacher, Mrs O’Sullivan was a middle-aged lay teacher who had family problems, which I was to discover, she brought with her to school and aired on a regular basis in the classroom. It is fair to say Jedda became very rude and got a snitch on her. It is also fair to say, I got a snitch on Mrs O’Sullivan, after I sneaked along to the classroom at St Annes and had an earful through the wall, of Mrs O’Sullivan’s hell of a life

with her husband etc., as told by the woman herself. Clearly she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and not fit to stand in front of a class of twelve-year-olds and teach.

I went to the Principal, Sister Virgilius, but she wouldn't listen. "We all have to be extra nice to poor Mrs O'Sullivan. Charity begins at home" she preached. I didn't want to be nice. I wanted my daughter taught properly.

I laid a formal complaint with the Chief Inspector of Schools, Mr Kelly (no relation to our family doctor) at the Education Department. He sent an inspector to St Annes. My complaint was upheld. Mrs O'Sullivan received a short suspension notice and I received a visit from Father Kennefick.

He accused me of sabotaging his school. I apologised and pointed out, as a matter of fact, that his school had turned into the Mad Hatter's Tea Party and my son was being taught by a full-blown religious zealot masquerading as Alice. He said to leave my son out of it and there was nothing wrong with Alice. How could I leave my son out of it I argued, when we were paying school fees through the nose, for supposedly a better education than what was on offer at the local state school? The lion in Father Kennefick moved in for the kill. "You can't blame the teacher if the boy won't learn".

"Perhaps I should remove him from St Annes and enroll him at the Manurewa East school?"

"YOU CAN'T DO THAT!" he thundered. I felt like a hyena that had just eaten.

Paddy's report card from the Manurewa East school was an excellent one. It was then, and only then, that I J conceded I had done the right thing.

So 1975 was uneventful except for the ruckus at St Annes, although I do recall in the August school holidays, Jedda and I made a visit to Zoe Limozin at Te Miro. Zoe had provided us with a hand-drawn map , showing a short-cut through the back of Gordonton in the Waikato. We went through Gordonton and a fair distance beyond, before Jedda who was navigating, read the map sideways and we became hopelessly lost in the wop-wops. We travelled through miles of forest country on unsealed roads full of potholes.

At one stage I had a feeling we were close, but we never did find Zoe's place. Instead we discovered by a fluke, a red car gone off the road into dense bush. We marked the spot with a stick in the ground and recorded the number plate number, which we gave to a policeman at a small police station, when we finally found our way back to civilisation. We saw only one house during our tiki tour. We stopped to ask directions. The lovely old Maori lady was home alone, completely blind and couldn't help us. She said her sons would be back soon.

Did the policeman locate the car? No-one contacted us, although we left our details with an “Excuse me. we’ve found a red car off the road about fourteen kilometres from here. We’ve put a stick in the ground, but we don’t know exactly where we’ve been. It is one kilometre from a little wooden house where an old blind Maori lady lives”. You can’t do any more than that. Road signs would have been a great help. At Christmas, Zoe invited us to visit her again. We took a different route and found her quite easily.

Jedda commenced her secondary schooling at St Benedicts Secondary school in Auckland city, in January 1976. She travelled from Manurewa by train daily. The days were long and tiring. Mid-way through the year, I J and I sat down and compiled a list as long as your arm, detailing the requirements of our family for the forthcoming three to five years. Two requirements were glaringly obvious. We needed to be planning better for Secondary schooling and Grand-dad Hector needed to be closer to specialist medical care. We decided to sell our home in Manurewa and move closer to the city.

# 6

## Ratty Dianne

Settling into our next home at Greenlane in December 1976 was easy. The house, next to Ratty Dianne's, had a wedding cake ceiling in the lounge-room, a large chandelier in the dining-room, plus oak panelling and leadlight windows. There was a park next-door with trees to climb and tennis courts behind. Jedda continued at St Benedicts School. Paddy began at Marcellin College.

The nuns at St Benedicts were excellent teachers. St Benedicts Secondary school had many high achievers. There were a few instances of bullying of Maori students by other students, and a few minor issues to do with disrespect and bad language. “I won’t have cheeky girls or bullies at my school” warned the Principal, Sister Patrice. And ‘the Creature from the Black Lagoon’ always meant what she said. Music was part of the St Benedicts’ curriculum. The music teacher Sister Jacinta tutored our daughter, helping her to

master the complicated notes on the grand St Benedicts Church pipe organ. Self discipline was not easy. We were proud parents. We had a tape recording of our daughter playing the Hallelujah Chorus. It sent glorious shivers up and down my spine. Like the throbbing tree of life itself, it was the closest sound to Heaven you could find. I loved that sound. The sound our daughter made.

A sobering incident involving I J and Jedda occurred during her final year at St Bens. I J ,fed up with teenage insolence following the excessive use of his home telephone, slapped his daughter lightly on the arm. Having never been even mildly chastised by her father in her life, it was a total shock to her system and she re-acted predictably and understandably. She called the police. After taking statements, the two young constables went next-door to Ratty Dianne. There was loud laughter in her front porch and then they left. That was the end of the sad matter.

Ratty Dianne, so named by our daughter, was a wonderful neighbour. She was attractive with a husky voice and she threw the most marvellous parties. You could always tell when the party was a raging success, by the fall-out. Once we got a broken Ming Dynasty vase, knocked off her mantlepiece by a rowdy Peter Williams. We also received a rickety nest-of-tables and a rocking chair.

Although we were not party animals ourselves, our offspring made a fair amount of noise. They'd crank up

the volume on the Akai Three-in-One stereo inherited from Dianne, for my favourite singer Kate Bush. You could hear Kate, effected by the scent of burning incense, calling out all over Greenlane, to Heathcliffe, that she had come home. If Kate had come home to our house, she would have been given a rollicking reception from fuzzy haired Michael Jackson and his brothers, whose posters were plastered on the basement walls.

Exuberance was everywhere. One musical evening, over-exuberant Elvis in his blue suede shoes, stepped on his own stack of records. The show had to go on. Enter Peter Sarstedt singing his wacky song to Sophia Loren. “Where do you go to my lovely, when you’re alone in your bed? Can you tell me the thoughts that surround you? I’d like to look inside your head. Yes I would. Yes I would. Yes I would. Yes I would. Ha Ha Ha”. Mick Jagger was present, complaining loudly to everyone within a city mile, about his inability to get satisfaction. The lad had no shame. Roger Whittaker was there, wanting to take my hand and lead me through the streets of London, to show me something that would make me change my mind. All I wanted was peace and quiet like ailing Grand-dad Hector.

Greenlane is close to Epsom. Grand-dad Hector had gone to stay at the Belle Brae Rest Home in Epsom. “Watch me, dear. I’m falling”. He remained at the Belle Brae with

his brother Ron, until he left his earthly form a short time later.

We were longing for another Cardigan Welsh corgi again. We bought our Sarah. (Rodwell Halloween). Jedda and I exhibited the corgis at dog shows, under our Bluemeadows kennel name prefix. Those were the days, driving with the young Cardigan and Pembroke Welsh corgis, from one end of the country to the other, making friends, competing and having fun. Later at home, the post mortems were held over coffee and toasted cheese sandwiches. All the good memories will be with me forever. The wins. The congratulations. Jedda's laughter.

We spent two years at Greenlane before the Beachlands countryside beckoned. There was a three bed-roomed house for sale, with plenty of outbuildings and land for more animals. I J had climbed another rung on his career ladder to Products Development Manager at Ellis Hardie Symington. He was a Company man through and through and he blamed the Prime Minister Rob Muldoon and his cohorts in the lousy, rotten Government for thwarting his endeavours to expand.

Negotiations towards the end of 1978 meant we left our home in Greenlane, for the country life at Beachlands, next to the Pony Club grounds. Folk in the rural community were very friendly and we were far enough away from the neighbours for the dogs not to bother anyone. The



*Ruby (Morag of Tibbermuir)*



*Ch. Bluemeadows Cemmaes*



*Ch. Bluemeadows Ptolemy  
(Best of Breed, Tux National Dog Show, 1981, 1982, 1983)*

surrounding farmland was backed by green hills and we had a partial view of Maraetai beach and the famous Akarana stud. One day curious, Jedda and I paid a visit to the stables across the road to see Uncle Remus up close. He was a big, wild eyed horse with lots of spirit. Jedda fell in love with him immediately, but he scared me half to death. His teeth were too big. Some of us prefer smaller teeth.

The Akarana stud was not the only attraction in the area. The Whitford Tip was a popular playground for those with a desire to play in rubbish. Two of the players were I J and son Paddy. For them, the Whitford Tip became a regular source

of scrap metal, lawn mowers, motor bikes, refrigerators and other treasures too numerous to mention. Most of the items were recycled and sold. The keen traders would hook up the trusty trailer laden with last week's leftovers every Saturday morning and return with a new load of exciting finds. The obsession spanned twelve years and was fairly lucrative. Although Jedda did not participate in the actual recycling, she displayed a mild interest. She had completed her time at St Benedicts school as Dux of St Bens. She had grown tall and serious. The glasses were discarded in favour of contact lenses, accentuating her blue/grey eyes. Her fair hair was long and shiny. Wisely, she took a year's break to enjoy a well deserved rest before leaving for Massey University in Palmerston North, to follow her dream of becoming a veterinarian. We were pleased. Many girls had no goals or aspirations. "You'll never manage without me" she said.

Sometimes the finds at the Whitford Tip were distressing. Old car bodies came in to be buried. Most came on a Saturday. The old Dodge came on a Saturday. I J and Paddy gave it a perfunctory glance, but it wasn't until they returned to the Tip on the Sunday, that they made a proper inspection. Peering through the grimy, moss-covered rear window, they spied a bundle on the back seat. The doors were locked. I J smashed the window and discovered a dead mother cat with two barely alive kittens. The poor animals had been placed

in the Dodge before it was dumped. Kinky and Mooee came home in Paddy's pull-over to join our animal menagerie. R.I.P. Mother Cat.

Happily in '76 a return to nursing had been possible for me, nursing the lovely ladies at the Caughey Preston Rest Home. These were ladies from a past era where life was filled with roses. The crème de la crème of Auckland society. So many names. So many separate rooms. So many tugs at the heart strings. Dear old white haired Mrs Crotty. Cups of tea at midnight. Crying for her little Annabelle Crotty, most wonderful Dachshund in the world. The corgi puppy smuggled in for her to cuddle. Her new Annabelle Crotty.

There was the singing. Singing songs for Nanny Constable. "She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes". Nanny's eyes watching, Watching for her Douglas. Douglas Myers. Little Mrs Percy ringing her bell. Always the pleading. "Can't you give me a pill so I don't wake up? I promise I won't tell anyone". The four bed ward. Occupants constantly wet. Battling a myriad of age-related disorders, forever hoping to be restored to full health. Sadly, there are no winners in these battles. There are only degrees of losing. Me and Lucy Watson changing the sheets.

Down the corridor, Room 212, gentle frail Mrs Prince, ever grateful for the care and attention. Thankful for the kindness. Prayer book in her hand. Lips moving silently.

There were so many charming, graceful, educated, elderly lady residents at Caughey Preston and the staff pampered them all.

Sister Phoebe Lange, mother of the late Prime Minister David Lange, was a kind Sister on the Day Staff. She suffered from varicose veins and bad legs; being overweight didn't help. The ladies were very fond of her. They fussed around, trying to make her job as easy as possible. She loved to sit and talk to them about her family and they lapped it up.

One morning as the Day Staff was arriving for duty and the Night Staff was heading off home, the telephone in Matron's office rang. I passed the phone to Sister Lange. "Is that you, David? Speak up. I can hardly hear you". She sounded a tad concerned. "No, David. No! You are not to let Naomi have the baby in the bath. Its a bad idea, David. Water births can be dangerous. David? David? Listen to me! David. DAVID!"

The other Staff member who comes to mind is Sister Findlay (alias Sister Mary Claudia). Prior to joining the staff at Caughey Preston, Sister Findlay had been a Catholic Missionary nursing nun in India. Returning to her Order in Auckland, she found it difficult to re-adjust to the convent life with its restrictions. The Hierarchy allowed her to work outside the convent, in the real world. She applied for the position of Deputy Matron of Rest Home A.

The ladies adored Sister Findlay. They'd follow her around, interrupting her schedule, attention seeking, complaining of a mild headache, constipation or a sore toe. They were probably quite genuine "God" she would wail. "Why do they keep coming to me with their trivial aches and pains? How can I be expected to pour out sympathy on these time-wasting individuals when I have watched women covered in flies dying in the back streets of India?" She liked to play the Drama Queen. My suspicion that her demeanour was merely an act, was confirmed on the night we had the Bedlam in Rest Home A.

Sister Findlay was standing -in for Matron who was on leave. She was occupying Matron's private flat over-night. It was the Night Staff's duty to wake Matron or her stand-in at 6am. ,with a tray of tea and toast. This particular morning I took the tray and knocked on Matron's door. "Come in" yawned Sister Findlay sitting up in bed. "Had a good night? Anything to report?" .

"Not a lot" I reported. "Seventeen ladies have diarrhoea and we have been running our legs off, all night".

"My giddy aunt!". She sprang from the bed in her striped flannelette pyjamas. Ten seconds later she was striding along the corridors in her dressing gown and slippers, shouting orders, running from room to room and checking her 'poor darlings'. In due course the cause of the outbreak

of diarrhoea was found to be tainted milk and Cookie in the kitchen, got the sack.

As I went off duty that ‘diarrhoea’ morning, I paused to admire a small black and white framed print of a work by the French sculptor Rodin, hanging beside the huge ornate floor-length gilt mirror in the foyer. Sister Findlay reached up and took the Rodin from the wall. “You’ve had a hideous night. Take it” she said. “Its mine from the convent”. The Rodin print hangs above my bed, a warm reminder of someone who was so unlike a nun, so dedicated and such fun.

It was still 1979. The Royal Family visited Auckland, to be greeted at Eden Park by the full-throated roar from a crowd of forty thousand. The Royal Yacht Britannia steamed up the harbour. My feet ached from standing and my ribs were sore from being jostled. In May, disgruntled protesters threw an egg and a few tomatoes at the Governor General Sir Keith Holyoake, as he arrived to open the 39th New Zealand Parliament. Unfortunately his aloof manner did not endear him to everyone and there were snide comments whilst he was in Office as Governor General and then as our Prime Minister, such as “Bugger off to Pahiatua” (where he came from) and “Take the plum out of your gob, Keith”. His modulated voice resembled my father’s voice, referred to by our mother as ‘putting on the dog’.

November 1979 will be remembered always. Air New Zealand flight T E 901 became the Erebus disaster. Russell and Cath Watt's daughter Susanne Marinovic was one of the air hostesses on the flight bound for a sightseeing trip to the Antarctic. The crash, in white-out conditions, reverberated around the world. 275 people died. In the afternoon, before the tragedy was known, Russell Watt phoned me. He often phoned for a chat about our corgis. Russell was an All Breeds judge. The Watts showed their corgis under the Bon Avoire prefix. Russell had finished giving fresh hay to his Toggenburg goats and he had returned to the house yard to discover a strong smell like scented lillies all around the ground. He searched thoroughly but failed to find the source of the scent. He was home alone, Cath being at work. "It's a complete mystery" he said to me. "I don't know what it is".

Several days passed before Russell, grief stricken by the loss of a dearly loved daughter, remembered Sue's last words to him. " I've left a little gift for Mum in the drawer of her dressing table. Make sure she gets it, Dad" In the drawer of the dressing table, Cath found a tiny bottle of Lily of the Valley perfume. On that awful November day, when the huge flying metal coffin slammed into the ice and snow, at the moment of impact, did Sue, in a supreme effort, return home to those she loved? More things are wrought by love than we know or understand.

1980 dawned full of promise. Our own daughter was excited. We bought her a Hillman Minx sedan and Paddy glued possum skins to the dash-board. She took the Yashika camera and the National Panasonic tape recorder that her father had given her, and she took the Hallelujah Chorus and she went off to university. Paddy continued at Marcellin College and we stopped going to Mass.

Before Russell Watt died in 1980, I promised him I'd teach Cath to drive his Toyota. Cath was no good behind the wheel. She was inclined to misjudge distance, to thrash the clutch, to speed. She overshot the gateway and put the car into the fence. Cath sold the Toyota before her second driving lesson. She had lost her confidence. Later, Cath gave me Russell's long handled hay fork with three prongs, used to toss hay for his goats. Did Russell intend for me to have it or was Cath trying to tell me something? Did it convey a message?.

# 7

## Break-in at Beachlands

Rock on 1981. My cream coloured Morris Minor, successor to Bridget, had been traded for a flashy saphire blue Datsun Cherry 100A. I J had climbed his career ladder to National Manager of Atlas Air Products.

Halfway through 1981, unassuming , peaceable Paddy left Marcellin College. Although Brother Peter was the Principal, it was generally accepted that the school disciplinarian was Mr Barber, an ex-army type, fit, fifty-ish and the maths teacher. He was tall and wore a green beret. He paraded around the field and schoolyard every lunch hour, swinging his bat, looking for smokers and troublemakers. Mr Barber was very big on discipline. There was an instance when two boys locked themselves in a classroom to sort out their differences, keenly watched by their classmates lined up at the windows. Mr Barber broke the door down. Shades of the Blackboard Jungle. Mr Barber would not be allowed to

roam freely with his bat down the halls of Marcellin today. There was a student in Paddy's class who had an ongoing bad experience at the school. The boy's parents were wealthy Germans who had come to New Zealand after the war. Regularly, the boy who wore home-made black leather shorts, was chastised with a cricket bat, in front of the whole class, by the Phys Ed teacher, for not wearing white shorts. The boy was punished because he failed to conform to the code of white p.e. shorts, the requirement of Marcellin College. How could he conform, for God's sake, when his own mother wouldn't let him?

I felt sorry for the boy. He would buy and devour books on guerilla warfare and books on how to commit the perfect crime. His father had been a tank driver and a sniper in the German army. He owned impressive guns, including a highpowered rifle with telescopic sights. In retrospect, I would have to say, considering the way he treated old Fred's son, the Phys Ed teacher who meted out the punishment, thereby painting a bull's eye on his own head, was one very lucky dude to be walking around.

After leaving school Paddy began work at Cascade Swimming Pools in Onehunga, learning to cut and weld swimming pool liners. He bought himself a car. He stayed at Cascade, plodding along for nine years. Making pool liners is hard work, dragging the heavy rolls of vinyl on a concrete floor and kneeling to cut the sections, then welding

the cut-out sections together with a high-frequency welder. Sometimes I worried. It must have been unpleasant working on the cold concrete factory floor. I also worried about the effects of the high-frequency welder. Was it a dangerous machine? I wondered whether it was safe or whether it leaked radiation. When in use it was magic. While the machine was operating, Paddy could hold a four-foot long fluorescent tube in his hand, and standing at a distance of up to two metres away from the machine, the tube in his hand would fully illuminate, with no wires attached. It was a strange phenomenon and quite spooky.

Now in her second year at Massey University, Jedda, her hair dyed dark and styled ‘afro’, brought home two fellow students for the holidays. Andrew was a nice boy. His parents had a farm in the Waikato. The other guest was Jenny, a slight girl, a couple of years younger than Jeddah and not very talkative. I remember thinking Jeddah had obviously brought Jenny with her in the hope of getting shy brother Paddy interested. Tall, brown haired, good-looking Paddy with the wide shoulders and quiet ways.

Wanting desperately for Paddy to create a favourable impression on his first girl friend I coaxed “Take a piece of fruit from the fruit bowl. Give it to her. Be friendly. She might like you”. Out on the lawn Paddy looked at Jenny with hooded eyes. “Want a banana?” he said.

“Oh. For God’s sake!” snapped Jedda. Jenny looked at Paddy as if he was the Devil Incarnate. The best laid plans of mice and men.

Making Kiwis proud in 1983, the New Zealand distance runner Rod Dixon won the 42.2 kilometre New York Marathon. The newspapers reported it was his ‘crowning glory’. Back in 1975, another New Zealander John Walker (Rona’s boy) had grabbed the limelight. He was twenty-three years old when he won his record breaking 3 minute 49.4 second mile at Gothenburg in Sweden. In an equivalent time, he would have beaten Jack Lovelock by 135 yards. The race was of special interest to our family, as Jack Lovelock was a distant relative on I J’s mother’s side. ( This fact has never been verified and is possibly an I J ‘porkie’).

And in 1983 we heard that old Connie had died. There was an overwhelming sadness. Rest in Peace, Connie, devoted teacher and best cricket player at Aspley school. May Perpetual Light shine upon you.

In July of the same year Jedda celebrated her 21st birthday at Massey University. I sent her \$100 of my hard earned wages. “Buy something nice for yourself” I said. She bought a large bottle of Galliano and sent me the empty bottle. She used the change to buy bulk liquor. They filled the bath with the inviting brew and she and her funny friends jumped in. It was at that stage I realised we were on shaky ground.

In 1984 we had the break-in. I had driven to John Rowan, the vet at Papatoetoe, with Rosie, one of the corgis. Coming home, approaching our property, I saw Thess, another of my Pembrokes, sitting beside our mailbox on the roadside. The dogs were never allowed out near the road. Something was wrong. I stopped the car in the driveway. Georgette, one of the Cardigans, came around the side of the house, carrying a piece of thick, checked fabric in her mouth. She seemed very pleased with herself. The panel of arctic glass in the front door had been smashed. The door was shut. Were the intruders still inside the house?

A neighbour came and said she had seen Georgette chasing two men into the quarry behind our property. The quick-thinking neighbour had dialled 111. The police arrived with tracker dogs and caught the culprits, one of whom needed treatment at hospital for dog bites. Corgis are only small dogs but they have decent sized teeth. Although the intruders ransacked our home, they didn't take much; thanks to Georgette, Ptolemy, Cemmaes, Annabelle Crotty and the others. Interestingly, none of the dogs got into trouble with the law for biting. The intruders could not identify which dogs had attacked them. In the police constable's own words "They all look the same, don't they?".

Friday nights once a month were reserved for window shopping in Queen Street, Auckland city. I J called the ritual

torture. He elected to stay at home. I went alone. I've done lots of things alone, but I've never been lonely. Lonely is for the weak-willed, the introverted and the singer of 'Oh Lonesome Me'. Friday night December 7th 1984, the night of the concert in Aotea Square, a riot took place in Queen Street. I was there. On the following Monday, the New Zealand Herald carried a front page report with the caption 'Well Done Hine Grindley' and a photo of a no-nonsense Maori warden striding up Queen Street with friends. Mrs Grindley led her group right up to the unruly mob in front of the Town Hall. She told the mob to go home. They listened and they went. I witnessed her act of bravery. She became an over-night celebrity and was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for public service.

The cause of the riot was youth mixed with alcohol. It is always the same. The beverage with the bitter taste is presented to the youthful multitudes as the great sweetener of life. To my mind, the riots and disturbances since then, have become progressively worse, corresponding with the lowering of the drinking age. You can blame the bureaucrats in the Beehive for that. It was they who gave the bloated, giddy youth more alcohol. Give them what they want. Grog. The bureaucrats should have been horse-whipped.

Jedda came home for Christmas 1985. Returning to Massey University in her upgraded car, she was involved in an

accident. She telephoned from Waiouru, between Auckland and Palmerston North, about mid-day. “I’m not hurt. The car is being towed to the Waiouru garage. Its stuffed”. And it was. Totally, utterly stuffed. She could have been killed. We were extremely relieved. She was so lucky. Andrew came to the rescue and loaned Jedda his Volkswagon. The loan was short. The V Dub was stolen from Massey University grounds and found burnt out somewhere. The police were unable to find the person responsible for committing the crime. We felt so sorry for Andrew.

Reflecting on family mishaps over the years, some minor accidents have shown life less than amusing. On one occasion at Greenlane, Paddy fell out of a tree in the park, breaking both arms. At Beachlands he almost severed his thumb on the circular saw and I J crushed his own thumb badly by the careless use of a car jack. At Greenlane, Jedda fractured bones in her right foot playing netball. I have been involved in only one mishap. I J mowed over stones (I told him not to) with the Kirby Lawson mower, sending a sharp stone in my direction, where it embedded itself in the side of my head.

“Its all I J’s fault” I moaned to the doctor at the Accident and Emergency room at Middlemore Hospital. “When I get home I’m going to stick ten steel knitting needles in him”.

“Don’t you think you are over-reacting a bit?.

“No. And I’m going to fling hot fat on him as well”.

“Fair enough”.

The doctor put the surgical tweezers in the kidney dish. He cracked his knuckles. Then he swabbed the gaping wound with a ghastly brown, stinging, pungent antiseptic solution. My whole skull was on fire. The blisters made me forget about the knitting needles and the hot fat. When we are in pain from stone injuries, we say stuff we don’t necessarily mean. There is a gap in our normal brainwaves. A short circuit is evident until common-sense and reason kicks in.

Happy New Year 1986. Paddy’s friend from Marcellin College days visited. I introduced him to my guard dog Georgette (Ch. Bluemeadows Jezalindy) a black and white Cardigan corgi that I’d trained from a puppy. She would turn vicious the minute I uttered the secret word “Fish!”. Seeking to impress old Fred’s son, I gave Georgette the secret word “Fish!”. What followed alarmed me.

The boy stared Georgette down and gave his own command in German. He kept staring her down. Georgette sank slowly to the ground and lay on her back with her feet in the air. She was reduced to a quivering wreck. There was only one way to overcome the problem. I would have to get a bigger, more intimidating guard dog, maybe a black Great Dane or a Mastiff.

Early one Saturday morning (I know it was a weekend, because the menfolk were playing at the Tip) the phone rang. It was Maureen's Murray. Maureen had left him. Just like that, he said. His Maureen. His lovely wife. The lovely mother of his lovely children had left him. He wanted me to be the first to know before he went to see Father at the church. What could I say to soothe his troubled spirit? What pearls of wisdom could I offer in his hour of cruel torment? What did he expect me to say?

Wait a minute. Wasn't this the Murray who yelled at his five kids too loudly? The Murray who, unbeknown to him but not to me, came oh so close to having his scrawny throat cut many times by his lovely wife Maureen? The lovely, lovely Maureen who sewed endlessly and tirelessly, making beautiful clothes for his children. Sewing her fingers to the bone; flared skirts, frilly tops, shirts and pyjamas. The lovely Maureen who cooked and baked far into the night to meet the needs of her growing brood and to fill her hubby's belly. Full of uncharitable thoughts I hung up. (Sorry, Murray).

An interesting pattern emerged after the Murray/Maureen shock/horror split. Maureen was ostracised by certain ladies of the Catholic Womens League. The saints were not pleased. They avoided her in the Supermarket and on the street. Also feeling left out, I J sought to overcome his own feelings of rejection by surrounding himself with cats.



*Jedda*

On holiday in 1987, Jedda took me to meet Andrew's father at the farm. Andrew was very attentive. It was a lovely day. Coming home, my happy mind was racing; planning the wedding, thinking of the presents. For my wedding I had received three wedding presents. The first was a small Brownie Downing picture of an aboriginal child, given to me by Matron Dorothea Harrison. It remains in my wardrobe for safe keeping. "I don't think you know what you're doing" she had said. The second gift was a wooden bread board in the shape of an apple, given by Third Year Nurse Shirley Moore. There was a card attached reading, 'Every time you use this board think of me'. And I have. The third wedding present remains hidden in my bottom drawer. It is a rude, see-through nightie covered in tiny blue flowers, presented to me by a bunch of scatty nurses who should have known better. I've never worn it. It is too short and I don't like the shoe-string straps.

Another thought crossed my mind. I must remember the wedding cake. There hadn't been a wedding cake for my wedding. We forgot to get one. Time ticks by. I might be a Gran in a couple of years. Now I was thinking of grandchildren, thinking of buying them bikes, as you do when you're a Gran. That is what a Gran is for. My own Grandmother, Nell Stuckey, gave me my first tricycle. It was a flat -bar with big wheels. Gran had cats and kittens to play

with on the farm; and ducklings. There was an old stumpy tailed cattle dog named Bluey.

My Gran would have loved Arnold. Arnold the black Great Dane joined our family following the visit to Andrew's father's farm. The corgis loved him. He was such a clown. You couldn't see him in the dark.

1988 was low-key. Dog shows saw me successfully chasing Best of Breed Awards and Championship titles. There was the endless grooming, the training and the presentation of the corgis. The dog scene is full of jealousy, bribery, scheming and corruption. The whole dog world is riddled with misfits, social climbers, gold diggers and know-it-alls. Its a hard ask to find the perfect competitor. I have seen some exhibitors arrive at dog shows the best of friends and watched as they've torn each other to pieces on the way home.

There is life after dog shows. Apart from my own dogs, work with Corgi Rescue kept me busy. One little tri-coloured corgi came to us through the S.P.C.A. She had been found wandering the streets of downtown Auckland. Tina Turner was elderly, according to the vet John Rowan. She had massive mammary gland tumours, a sore foot and big, sad eyes. John said decisions had to be made. She was elderly. She was worn out.

I made my decision. I booked her in for major surgery and prepared I J for the seriously high vet bill. After the surgery, my kind, generous husband wrote the cheque with a trembling hand. “She is not staying” he informed John Rowan. I fondled Tina’s lovely soft ears. “Corgis are for keeps”. Tina spent five years with us in happy retirement before she died of true old age. For the last year of her life, she slept at night under Ian McDonogh’s blankets. I know my husband better than he knows himself.

# 8

## The Move to Waipipi

To know one's self is the most important aspect of a lasting relationship. It is the secret of a long and happy marriage. Happiness however, is a finite condition and needs to be constantly worked at, in various ways. Sometimes my sister visits with her fife. We both own fifes, given to us when we were young girls at school in Queensland. We played in the fife band at the little Aspley school up on the hill. We'd walk the mile or so to school from our home near Cabbage Tree Creek. At school we learned about split infinitives and the length of a koala bear's appendix. My teacher was Mr James Conran. Connie had a jolly, round red face and hardly any hair. When he laughed his fat belly moved under his crumpled shirt. Sometimes he had gravy on his tie. Or egg yolk. The Head Teacher was Henry George Soper. A wirey little man, a dead ringer for the late Malcolm Muggeridge who refused his Knighthood from the Queen, Henry George spent most

of his day in his office, venturing out to administer ‘the cuts’ to boys who wouldn’t learn. He taught my father.

My sister’s teacher was dapper, curly haired Mr Ford. Fordie was much younger than Connie and he didn’t seem right. Lloyd Thomas, a big boy in Grade Five called Fordie a ‘sissy’. Fordie failed to see the humour of the remark. Poor Lloyd got sent to Henry George for the ‘cuts’ Six of the best with his lawyer cane, fashioned from the supple lawyer vine that stings like stinging nettles. Lloyd didn’t care. He often got the ‘cuts’. He was a slow learner.

My sister disliked Fordie. He would say to her “You’re not as smart as your sister, are you?”, which was a mean ,stupid thing to say. I wished the school bus would run Fordie down. Sisters can become very catty when teachers make inflammatory comments. I wasn’t smarter. I just listened more intently because I wanted Connie to like me. Twice in 1953 my best friend Dell Doull beat me for Top of the Class. I suspect it was because she was sticky-beaking at the answers on my pad. At the end of the year I beat Dell in the annual Queensland Scholarship Examinations, for the Parliamentary Bursary. An important Member of Parliament came to our school to present the prize at Assembly. He shook Connie’s hand and my hand. Henry George said “Well done”. I saw Connie smiling. His tie was nice and clean. He was so happy and I wished he was my father.

Please excuse me for writing about our school days, which have little to do with the state of Holy Matrimony. The recollections just popped into my head. For school, our mother dressed us as twins, although I was two and a half years older. We had pretty dresses with starched frills, matching hair ribbons and new shoes every few months. We were easily the best dressed pupils. Some pupils had no shoes. In Grade Two I gave Percy Chapman my new shoes for his sister, in exchange for an empty cigarette packet. Wild Woodbine packets were hard to find. I remember the transaction well. And the fall-out.

The Second World War ended as I began school. I can recall the last days of the Depression. Scores of ‘swaggies’ came on foot from New South Wales and made their way to North Queensland in the hope of getting work in the sugarcane fields. Regularly, a ‘swaggie’ camped at night under the Cabbage Tree Creek bridge bordering our property. Late in the evening, my mother would walk to the boundary fence and call out “Excuse me. Would you like a bite to eat?”.

A weary face would appear from under the bridge. “Yes please. Much obliged”. I don’t think it occurred to my mother to offer a hunk of bread with a thick chunk of sausage ( or maybe it did). She set a tea tray with a cloth and a fine bone china cup and saucer. There was a large tea pot of tea, plenty of milk and sugar and a plate with big slices of Genoa cake full of sultanas and cherries. I saw her carry out

the ritual many times and each time she went to the fence next morning to collect the empty tray, it was there with the cup and saucer and the empty tea pot. No-one ever stole the tray. You couldn't do that now. It was a different world back then, with different values. I like to imagine one or two of the 'swaggies' met again up North and talked about the kindly woman at Cabbage Tree Creek who gave them tea and Genoa cake on a fancy tray. And a bit of self respect.

Anyhow as I've said, my sister visits with her fife. We huff and puff away, making music; bringing to life the good old songs. 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' and 'The Wearing of the Green'. Some people with no appreciation of the delicate sound of the fife, refer to the expression of our musical talent as hideous "Bastardised Noise". The term 'Bastardised Noise' was coined by a half-demented Hector McDonogh, to describe the sound made by his own seventeen-year-old son Ian, as he practised and practised tympani under the guidance of bandmaster Harold Cecil Albert Fox, for the Hawera Municipal Band fund raiser concerts. Kettle-drums do not have a great range of notes.

At Beachlands, finding funds to feed the Rescue dogs became a challenge. I was pleased to secure a small weekly contract with Klissers Bakeries for twenty-five loaves of left-over Vogels fruit bread returns, which I collected on Monday mornings, for the corgi's breakfasts.

Never take anything for granted. One Monday morning when I went to Klissers' office to pay my \$5, I was told that a pig farmer/ politician who had a large piggery in South Auckland, had signed a weekly contract for all the leftover bread. I appealed to the Klissers management. They explained to the pig farmer/politician. Would he do the decent thing? Twenty-five loaves out of a whole truck load. "No. He wants it all". The world is full of greedy, hungry pigs.

Living at Beachlands meant that I had to drive along a winding stretch of country road at Whitford, on the Maraetai side of the Whitford Gorge, to get to Night Duty at Caughey Preston. One eventful night I came upon an old Bedford van parked by the roadside. The occupants of the van were wandering aimlessly on the road. Were they going to prevent me from passing? Were they going to do me a mischief? There had been a spate of incidents reported in the New Zealand Herald. The police were warning people travelling at night to be careful.

Coming closer. I identified a male figure bending over with his big, white bare bum facing me in my headlights. The bum was leaping up and down and moving from side to side. Alarm bells began jangling in my head. The bum was in front of me. Coming closer. Closer. Mustn't panic. Big white bum shining in the headlights. Coming to get me. Coming to get poor Nursie. Closer. Closer. Yahoos throwing

stones. Accelerate. Brake. Accelerate. Swerve. Too close. It had to happen. I collided with the idiot. Skittled him. “Eff wit! Eff wit!” the yahoos yelled after me.

Because of the speed with which the manoeuvre was executed, and also due to the pitch black conditions, not a single yahoo got my registration plate number. IJ said I did the right thing. And what is the moral of the story? If you plan to surprise people in the dark, watch out for eff wits.

1989. Having spent extra time gaining her Bachelor of Science Degree, Doctor Jedda McDonogh, qualified vet, had graduated from Massey University. She announced that she was going for two years to Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, to study for her Masters Degree. She promised she would return at the end of the two years. When the leaving came, farewelling her at Auckland airport, I cried inside as you do when you ’re a mum. Jenny went too.

Spring had sprung. There were signs everywhere. Hundreds of blossoms appeared on the Golden Queen peach tree outside the kitchen window. The Lisbon lemon tree had sprouted new leaves. The fejona trees were spreading, almost touching the grapefruit tree. There would be no shortage of fresh fruit. The perfume of lavender and roses from the front garden pervaded the place. The bees were busy. Long tendrils on the passionfruit vine down at the fowl-house were feeling their way across the wire netting. The swallows

came back from Capistrano or wherever they had been all winter and took up residence again in the old garden shed. Fantails, magpies and thrushes came. My favourite pair of wood pigeons from the previous year arrived to sample the berries on the puriri trees. Life was good.

Fluffy the Bantam hen had gone broody on her nest in the corner of the fowl-house. One morning I J was about to collect the eggs from the other hens, when Fluffy left her nest briefly, to eat in the outside run. I J stood fiddling with the wire latch on the door of the fowl-house. I watched him. “Don’t go in there”. The remark fell on deaf ears. He chose not to share my knowledge of the situation.

In the darkness inside the fowl-house, the young rooster Winston Megastar Putu, attacked I J with murderous intent. Fluffy ran into the fowl-house and joined in. It was an emotional experience with lots of squawking and shouting. Apart from lacerations, I J almost suffocated in chook feathers. That is what happens when one is totally unacquainted with the nature of poultry.

Christmas 1989 saw us move to Waipipi, where the old tennis courts used to be, seven kilometres from Waiuku, with the dolls, corgis, sheep, goats, chooks, cats, ducks and budgies. Paddy came too. Behind the property on the other side of the estuary is the New Zealand Steel Mill at Glenbrook; guardian of the landscape. I J became tired of

travelling the long distance to his office in Auckland and he retired from the Company, the following April. Retirement does not mean retirement from work. Together we set about improving the property. We built new sheds, put a deck on the house, renovated the barn and re-roofed the old tennis pavilion.

Now that they had a good sized barn to work in, the menfolk decided to indulge in a new hobby; restoring old cars. Their first gem was a dilapidated grey Ford Prefect, hauled from Clevedon at great cost, by a local tow truck operator. It went into the ‘too hard’ basket and later to the scrap yard. The second project was the Daimler Conquest Century 1954 model. Not only did it consume time and attention, it needed to be fed constantly with money in the form of grease, rubber mountings, grommets, fanbelt, another radiator, muffler, headlight etc. In the end ,the enthusiasts saw sense and sold it. A family conference was held and we agreed, cars were no good. Tractors were better.

The International A554 tractor was found in a paddock at Ramarama, where it had been resting since Adam was a boy. A local tow truck operator brought it home. I remember thinking what a giant, grotesque heap of mechanical horse poo it was, but I didn’t say anything. You should never say anything. It was too big and heavy to shift off the lawn, so there it stayed, a big dead maggot covered by a tarpaulin. It

stayed for months while its dedicated crew tinkered with its corroded innards to get it working. Tender loving care was lavished upon it.

Never say “Die”. One day unexpectedly, the maggot fired. Then it fired again and kept running for several minutes. I J said it had one flogged big end bearing (whatever that meant). The crew drove down the road, jumping up and down on the pedal to free the frozen clutch. They drove to Wally’s place. “Holy Moley!” Wally yelled. “You’ve got a HELICOPTER there. She’s got a RUN BIG END. She’s NOISY!”. After replacing the big end bearings, the enthusiasts put a better seat on the International A554, used it for a year, then gave it a coat of paint and sold it to a tractor nutter.

The next project was the Ferguson 24 tractor. It was in working condition and came from a local farmer. I J said it purred like a kitten. The menfolk agreed they needed to pretty the old girl up with a new heatproof paint job. The three-man crew spent ages sanding, rubbing down, under-coating. Care had to be taken to get it just right. (I hate doing sanding. I hate being bossed about).

When finished, the Fergie was a showpiece. The little grey gnat had been transformed into a wonderful red and blue shining butterfly. Her tyres were blackened and her steering wheel was polished. The butterfly sat for several weeks and the butterfly’s battery went flat.

The Fergie was dead. Paddy got his truck from the shed and connected a chain to the truck's tow bar and to the front of the tractor behind. He planned to jump start the Fergie. I J's job was to sit on the tractor with it in gear, and hold his foot down on the clutch until the tractor was up to speed, before letting the clutch out. Paddy would drive the truck.

The scene is set. Paddy is in the truck. I J is seated on the Fergie. The truck moves forward and increases speed. The tractor speeds along behind. It is almost flying. Paddy shouts "LET THE CLUTCH OUT". I J responds. He lets the clutch out. The tractor fires. Paddy stops the truck. I J with the throttle in the 'full' position, has a senior moment. Forgets to brake. Fergie rams back of truck, crushing Fergie's radiator and destroying most of the engine. Patient, peaceable Paddy leaps from the cab of his truck."YOU'VE MUNTED IT!" he screams. "I HAVE NOT! YOU SORRY ARSED RATBAG!" shouts his dear old Dad. (I do believe they would have become physical if I hadn't thrown a tin of water on them). The Ferguson 24 was too badly damaged to straighten with a crow-bar. We gave her to a friend further up the peninsula, for the friend's boisterous children to play on. Every cloud has a silver lining. Paddy and I J went fishing instead.

Orua Bay is thirty-eight kilometres from here, towards the Manukau Heads. There are other fishing spots closer

to home; the boat ramp at Te Toro, Hamilton's Gap, the shallows at the end of Waipipi Wharf Road, just around the corner within walking distance, but they preferred Orua Bay.

Some of us don't like dead fish. I continued to exhibit the corgis, but my appearance at dog shows became less frequent. Several of my doggie friends had died, others had moved away. There were new faces everywhere. I turned my attention to breeding corgi puppies again. Our well-known Bluemeadows kennel name meant the sale of the puppies was guaranteed. I sold corgis to gay couples. I had a website with a rainbow indicating an acceptance of gay folk.

Christmas 1991 was memorable. Jeddah came home from Monash University with her Masters Degree. She dropped the bombshell. "Stick to your guns" advised her old school friend on the telephone. Gaylene is married with children. How could it go so wrong? "There's nothing in New Zealand for me now". Jeddah had made her choice. She returned to Melbourne. We should have guessed. Of all the ups and downs of the married state, this was my worst 'bad hair' day. Jeddah told us the psychologist at Massey University had said that she had been gay since the age of five. He advised her to sever all ties. I wondered whether he was the same psychologist who had put it into our daughter's head earlier, that I was responsible for her inability to relate to

the opposite sex, the reason being, I had sent her to a single sex secondary school. Here was an articulate girl with an outgoing confident nature, who had grown up in a family with a father and a brother who adored her. Here was a girl whose own mother had attended a single sex secondary school. Dumbfounded, I went to bed that night, after that episode, and pondered on the biggest cop-out I'd ever heard. Then, echoing down through the years, came I J's words to me. "You're not going to believe a kid, are you? Kids are always making things up". I lay there submerged in so many thoughts and I knew I would never find answers. What about Andrew?

Digressing once more, Jedda's subsequent visit (1993) was brief. I J, Paddy and I sat down for a serious chat with her. We genuinely wanted to understand her chosen way of life better. We needed to clarify certain issues. I enquired whether she knew her Nana (my mother) had phoned in tears before she died, to tell me of a conversation that she had overheard between Jenny and Andrew.

"You're a liar!" Jedda accused me. "I don't have to sit here and listen to this". She walked out. She sought refuge at my sister's home further up the peninsula. Unbeknown to us, my sister drove her direct to Auckland airport the next morning and she returned to Melbourne. Looking back, I know this was the day our daughter became my sister's

adopted daughter and our family fell apart. And it was all because of that phonecall from Brisbane. In the days that followed I noticed a decline in my David Niven. He had been transformed into a whiskery, ageing grump. The bathroom mirror was ‘enemy mine’. Audrey Hepburn had become Phyllis Diller and Paddy had become a very cynical person. To his uncomplicated way of thinking, his lovely, talented, clever, kind sister had ‘backed the wrong horse’.

# 9

## Caravan Bob

Early in 1992 one of Mc Carthy's cows died of bloat. Did I want cheap, fresh dog's meat? \$20 and Wendy would help me butcher it. The big puffed-up body looked so sad. We removed a rear leg with our razor-sharp knives. Wendy suggested we screw the head around and flip the whole beast over to facilitate butchering. As we heaved and shoved the gross tonnage, the trapped gas inside made the thing go "Moo. Buurrrp". We cut off the other three legs and opened the abdomen. We hung the stomachs on the barbed wire fence and cleaned them with the wash-out hose. Then I fell into the intestines. Wendy said "You'll stink for weeks". I thought of I J with his bedroom mind and I laughed like Phyllis Diller. Wendy said "We must do this again sometime". And we did.

Later in 1992 Paddy bought land, an eleven acre back block on Dickey Straight, five kilometres from our home

and past the Te Toro turn-off, before Pollok, just past the old Douglas memorial home, not as far as the little white church at Kohokohe built in 1886. There was a three hundred metre easement for access. We fenced the entire length using posts and battens. We built a storage shed and installed a generator for power. We slashed and burnt head-high ‘old man’ gorse. A creek ran through the lower part of the sloping block and there was a pump shed with a pump to draw water to the water troughs in the top paddocks. Approximately half the property was covered in very old *Pinus Radiata* trees. There were very tall pungas for nesting rosellas. A peaceful shady glade with multi-coloured mushrooms and ferns nestled in the far corner of the lower paddock. Scented pink and white manuka scrub grew beneath a stand of totara, wattle, pohutukawa and kauri trees. The opposite corner was a swamp.

*Logging trucks fully laden haul the mid-day sun.*

*Ringing the verdict is a lone tui, a jury of one.*

*Lorikeets wearing bright regalia, ten judges in a row*

*complain loudly, bicker, pass sentence and go.*

*Leaving baby rabbits exposed and vulnerable*

*to save their own skins.*

*Down on the lower block*

*pukekos startle browsing stock.*

*Puriris coax kererus, one by one.  
Swamp flax baits the victor's run.  
Anticipation lies under frog's eyes.  
Grand-daddy eel takes his prize,  
slithers and moves on.*

*Lichen, moss and ferns unfolding.  
Totaras and kowhais holding  
counsel with kauris tall.  
Pohutukawas red at last.  
Voices from a distant past.  
The forest hoards them all.  
Reverent, I step lightly to his throne.  
Tanemahuta breathes easy  
and rightly claims his own.*

Soon after purchasing the land, Paddy put a re-locatable house there, bought another truck, a Ferguson 28 tractor, a chainsaw and a safety hat, and began felling the old, gnarly pines. He was in business selling firewood and supplementing his income with the sale of lambs from the sheep in the top paddocks. Paddy and I J worked well as a team, although often Paddy would come for his lunch alone. “I’ve had to leave Gretel back in the forest” he’d say quietly. They were having a bad day. They survived. The firewood orders piled up and the money rolled in.



*The Fergie 28, 'Uncle Pad' and Nadia.*



*Paddy at work.*



*The log-splitter*



*I.J.*

All the money in the world couldn't save our lovable clown Arnold. Tragically he was struck down with bone cancer (osteogenic sarcoma) of his front leg. Great Danes have a definite propensity for bone cancer. Males are effected more often than females. It is usually a disease of the middle years. Arnold was six. We had to let him go. He broke our hearts. R.I.P. Valleydane Lord Arnold.

In the summer, Paddy allowed a caravan dweller to camp on his land. The caravan dweller's name was Caravan Bob. He was mid-sixty, rather grubby, but harmless. He had amazing books on the early settlers of Northland and the gum digging era, which he loaned in exchange for a chat. We learned a lot from Caravan Bob. It was partly due to his influence that Paddy set up a small Collectables Museum in the old tennis pavilion next to our house. We heard rumours that Bob was a criminal from way back, furtively dabbling in dope. There was no evidence of it. Pseudoephedrine (P) wasn't available then, to cook our kids brains and turn them into strangers. We were less anxious when our children were growing to adulthood. We are thankful for the absence of P in their lives. P brings personal degradation, parental misery and festering sores that never heal. On the other hand, 'p' is for persuasive psychologist. A much more subtle brain scrambler.

Unfortunately we had to let Caravan Bob go. He kept tearing up bits of newspaper and it blew across the

paddocks, making a mess. Wondering what on earth he was tearing paper for, one morning I found out. I had gone up to Paddy's place early and there in the lower paddock, with the dew still on the grass and the sun shining brightly and the birds twittering; there in my most favourite spot, the closest spot to Heaven itself, squatted Bob, trousers around his ankles, over his freshly dug hole.

We met Ray and Margaret Williams in 1993 when Paddy was selling firewood. They had a Vintage Tractor and Collectables Museum in Marae O Rehia Road in Waiuku. Besides the many restored vintage tractors, there was a huge assortment of century-old farming equipment, agitating washing machines, lamps, tin cars and toys. By 2002, poor old Ray had suffered several strokes. During the week he was cared for by the staff of Franklin Memorial Hospital and he came home to Margaret at the weekends. It was a sensible arrangement that suited them both. However, occasionally when we'd visit, the farm boy in his eighties would be depressed. "How are you, Ray?" Paddy would say.

"No good".

"So what do you want? A knife? A rope? Or a gun?"

"Ha ha" Ray would say "I'm buggered if I know. Life gets tasteless sometimes". The light-hearted banter would continue with an exchange of local gossip until Margaret appeared with the tea and cakes. Margaret is an excellent

cook. She does jams, chutneys, pikelets, biscuits, Christmas cakes and all kinds of pies etc. Some consumers believe a great deal of harm is done by weight reducing quacks and cooking gurus pushing food fads like curried sheep's ears and garnished road kill. Give the consumers what they want. Pork pies and lamingtons with cream. There never used to be all this silliness with food. I blame the TV cooking programs.

I like to think our visits cheered Ray up a bit. We'd take an item we'd bought at an auction or garage sale, for him to examine and pass an opinion. His eyes would twinkle as he reminisced and we'd walk with him down memory lane; in the lounge, in his wheelchair. His tractors were sold in 2002. The museum items were sold in 2004. Ray has gone now, but Margaret is still there and we visit regularly. Items bought from the Williams' museum have formed the basis of our own collection. Ray lives on. In March '93, I J received Jedda's letter.

October 1994. We drove the five hundred kilometres to sleepy Hunterville near Feilding to view a property for sale. We stopped at a place named Mangaweka for directions and petrol at the garage. There was a camouflaged aeroplane restaurant and a number of saffron-robed Hari Krishna gents wandering about. Not the sort of folk you'd expect to find in Mangaweka. At the garage Paddy got a call from nature. He walked across the forecourt to the rest room.

Meantime, a big covered-in semi-trailer and truck unit pulled into the garage for diesel. Displayed on the side of the unit was a massive advertisement promoting a brand of breakfast cereal and depicting a voluptuous, skimpy-clad bimbo holding a bowl of shredded wheat. The young garage attendant studied the bimbo. He expressed his pleasure. “Very peachy”. The middle-aged truck driver shook his head. “No good”.

“Why’s that?”

“Silicon. All silicon. Not natural”.

The attendant digested the revelation. Slowly the truck driver pulled away, cursing silicon and lamenting a sign of the times.

Paddy was emerging from the rest room entrance as a small, smiley, saffron-clad gent went to pass. The gent was sniffing a large sunflower which he thrust into my son’s face. My son is not a person who appreciates sunflowers up close. He took on a boxing stance with clenched fists and the smiley gent fled. I asked Paddy “What was wrong with that chap?”. He smoothed the sleeve of his jacket, ran his fingers through his hair and answered in a high soprano voice. “Well hello Dolly. My name’s Polly”.

We found the property at Hunterville without difficulty. It wasn’t worth the trip. The train tracks went behind the house. We didn’t step out of the car. I made a ‘u’ turn on

the road and we drove non-stop home to Waipipi. Home to the lush green grass, the magical sunsets, an uninterrupted view of the night sky, the early morning mist and the fantails singing in the daphne bush. Our foray into property speculation was over.

In 1995 we had the business of the pet shop puppies. The pups came to my attention as the result of phone calls from the public. Pedigree puppies, including pedigree corgi puppies, were being sold through pet shops for extremely high prices, to undesirable owners. I sought the co-operation of Bob Kerridge from the S.P.C.A. to overcome or at least contain the problem. A high proportion of the unwanted puppies was surfacing at the S.P.C.A. . We called them 'five minute wonders'. Some pet shops were providing a Time Payment Plan for their customers. (It really is the pits, when one has to pay off one's pet).

Bob Kerridge was sympathetic. He assured me of his full support. In the course of discussion with Bob, I stumbled upon the root cause of the problem. The New Zealand Kennel Club, responsible for the welfare of all pedigree dogs, had no Code of Ethics. There was no control over the members, some of whom were less than honest. I contacted the N.Z.K.C. and spoke at length to George Mills, the Director/Secretary. He wouldn't listen. George rarely listened to me. "It's a Civil matter" he said. (Wrong answer, George).

I fronted up to an Auckland pet shop, bought an expensive pedigree Dachshund puppy (our Bobby Magee) sent the receipt to George Mills and contacted the Commerce Commission. It occurred to me the pet shop puppy problem was not about dogs. It was about money.

What followed was a period of intense agitation at the highest level, meaning obtaining select N.Z.K.C. correspondence under the Official Information Act and relaying it back to George Mills. Finally the New Zealand Kennel Club saw sense and a Code of Ethics was introduced.

I think it was in 1995 that Tivoli Tom, the top winning Greyhound trained by Pat Patterson of Te Toro, retired. Someone will correct me if I'm wrong. Tivoli Tom won the New Zealand Derby , as an unknown, in 1991. He had an illustrious career and was always well supported by the people of Waiuku and Pukekohe. Pat Patterson, Tom's trainer, was killed instantly when her new four-wheel-drive vehicle rolled out of control on a bend in the road near Sawmill Hill, about five years ago. Pat was one of those feisty, rough diamonds who didn't age gracefully. Towards the end , in a mood of mild depression, exacerbated by a painful hip joint condition, she confided "Its tough at the top, Mac" I admired her immensely.

Every rural community has its identities. Gone but not forgotten in Waiuku is Seagull, an underweight young

man, impaired from too much study and the sun. He often wore casual dress while strolling around the town; just the floppy pants and his beet-root red sunburnt , blistering skin. One sizzling hot summer's day I bought a straw hat and gave it to him as he lay on the pavement outside the Waiuku Information Centre. "Hello" I said. "Here's a hat for you. Put it on. It will look nice. You won't get sunburnt". Seagull. effected by the searing, blinding sun, struggled to his feet, took the hat without a word, staggered stiff-legged to the green Franklin District Council rubbish receptacle and stuffed his brand new hat in the hole. We miss Seagull. Waiuku is not the same without him.

# 10

## Petfood Nancy

For years Paddy and I have frequented annual inorganic rubbish collections. My sister calls the practice disgusting. Call it scavenging if you will, doing the rounds of the inorganic rubbish piles in South Auckland, looking for treasures cast aside by folk who don't realise what they are throwing away. We have saved items such as antique tools, cameras, war memorabilia, old clocks, old books, pictures in oak frames, postcards, old toys and valve radios. We sing as we go "Bringing in the sheaves. Bringing in the sheaves. We will come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves".

(Forgive me, for I know not what I do).

Once when we were out enjoying the thrill of the hunt , looking for gold ,talking to Jim Peacock at one of his weekly auctions at Pukekohe, I J home alone and not content to relax and watch television, went to burn the gigantic pile of half-green branches heaped up in the back paddock

near the duck pond. Because the heap failed to burn, he decided to use an accelerant. He grabbed the petrol can from the workshop and flung the contents on the branches, having already lit the smouldering lot with newspapers. The flames licked back to the can in his hand and the very same second the can was ablaze. He hurled the can in the air and it landed in the duck pond. The remaining petrol in the can, engulfed the pond and two ducks in flames. There is nothing like the smell of burning duck feathers. He didn't want me to tell Maureen, but I did. "He burnt the ducks". Maureen was sympathetic. "Roast duck is yummy with a nice sherry or perhaps a dry, white wine".

Just as 1986 was a bad year for Maureen's Murray, 1996 was a bad year for Maureen. She was diagnosed with throat cancer. I had a talk with her. When I was seventeen, working a live-in job on a sheep property at Jondaryan on the Darling Downs in Queensland, I discovered a rapidly enlarging growth in my mouth under my tongue. The Oakey doctor removed it using a local anaesthetic, while I sat up like Jacky in the Oakey dentist's chair, in a big pool of blood.

Later on, I found myself in the Brisbane General Hospital. Swallowing and speaking was difficult. The growth was back with a vengeance. The surgeon was Doctor Evan Thomson. He told my mother the growth might return and spread. She cried. The prognosis was not good. I didn't believe him. Not for one second. When you are young and carefree, you tend

not to believe. You do not accept. A few months later, when I felt better, I completed my application form to enter the General Nursing Course at the Brisbane General Hospital. The reply was brief and to the point. ‘Your medical records indicate you are unfit to undertake the General Nursing Course. Your application has been declined’. The very next day I enrolled at St Andrews Hospital. I come from a determined family. The phrase ‘has been declined’ is not in our vocabulary. I told all of this to Maureen.

“Don’t let the medical men scare you”

“Quite right” she declared. “What would they know?”

“Exactly”.

We laughed. Maureen would be fine.

Maureen underwent radical surgery and chemotherapy, while we feared for her. Following the tracheotomy she learned to speak, an enormous relief. Jerry, her rugged new man became her devoted carer. He still is. He is also more visually appealing than moon-faced, short-legged Murray. And Jerry likes animals. All sorts of animals and birds, especially dead ducks. He is a keen duck shooter, or if you prefer, duck murderer.

Over the years my husband and I have had numerous discussions about the ducks and the animals in our lives.”No more goats or ducks” I know he doesn’t

mean it. “Get the corgis out of the house. Get Maisie off the lounge”.

“Its not Maisie. Its Lulu”.

“They all look the bloody same”.

For some inexplicable reason, Maisie has days when she thinks the lounge belongs to her. It is her own private property. A bone of giant proportions to be savoured, to be enjoyed, not to be shared. What cared she when the human crept behind her lounge and did a convincing Vincent Price with sound effects? Vincent got savaged.

The dogs are not the only ones to feel the cut of I J’s tongue. There was the fuss with the sheep. They each have names. Marion, Alice, Mrs Beasley, Pauline, Fat Evelyn, Mr Nobody and Speedy Gonzales. Pauline pushed the taranaki gate open and they disappeared over the hill behind Garth’s paddocks. For a time they were visible through the binoculars.. I J was optimistic. “They could be walking to Waiuku. Hopefully they will return and never want to leave again”. Damn fool. Eventually we managed to corner the sheep near Shuker’s boundary, where Ian McDonogh fell in a drain. He threw a huge tantrum. His silly behaviour lasted until he went to bed. It went on and on. How I’d made him live in the country. How he’d never wanted to live in the country. How he wished he’d never clapped eyes on me. And my sister was a cow.

As I lay on my pillow in bed that night, I thought of several ways to stop his silly behaviour. They were all quite good but they were all against the law. Then the unmistakeable voice of Archbishop Liston came to me in the darkness."Now kiss your ring. And remember... you are in the state of Holy Matrimony". In the state of what? Archbishop who? "Thou shalt not speak ill of the deaaddd". The unmistakeable voice with the slight speech impediment, prolonging the last word of each sentence, bored into my brain. "I'm sorry" I said to Archbishop Liston. Sometimes women say things they don't mean. They can be moody, inclined to quarrel and contradict. Other times they can be the essence of sweetness and delight. Understanding and loving.

A week or so after the sheeps' walkabout, the shearer Charlie Clark from Boundary Road, came to shear the sheep. Fat Evelyn our twelve-year-old ewe was looking exceptionally large. I J spoke to Charlie in the pen. "What do you reckon, Charl? Is the old girl in lamb by any chance?" Charlie Clark is very experienced in his field. "Nah" he said. "She's full of grass. Lush green grass". Days later Fat Evelyn produced triplets. We put her picture in the local Waiuku and Districts Post newspaper and Charlie copped lots of flak from his pals at the Kentish Hotel.

Anyone will tell you that old pet sheep with lambs can be formidable and dangerous, but even simple pleasures like

fishing mid-week at Orua Bay can be fraught with danger. One afternoon when they arrived at their favourite fishing spot, I J and Paddy were surprised to find a middle-aged, neatly dressed chap and his attractive wife in her pink twin-set and jewellery, sitting there. I J took his gear out of the truck, went through the pointless exercise of cutting the bait into the correct shapes to lure the fish, put the gut buckets at the ready and prepared to cast his line into the tide.

He did a circular motion with the rod over his head. “What the duece is going ON?!”. The hook had become embedded in the sleeve of the nice lady’s twin-set. “NOW LOOK WHAT YOU’VE DONE!”. He glares at the woman whose husband, quite rightly takes exception to his missus being intimidated by a lunatic fisherman with a fibreglass rod. “You’ve done it wrong, Dad”. Paddy goes to have an identity crisis in the truck, while his dear old Dad attempts to untangle his messy line from around the lady’s body. She begins screaming loudly, on account of (a) the hook is ripping into her flesh, and (b) she imagines that she is being molested.

After it was over, the two townies left to seek First Aid, Paddy came out of hiding, packed the gear and listened to complaints from his father all the way home about ‘the ratbags from Auckland who come up here scaring the fish’ Paddy knows it is best to remain silent at such times. In certain situations, some dear old Dads can be ready to strangle their

sons on the slightest provocation. "You're no son of mine!". Later when tempers had cooled, I challenged I J ."What were you thinking of?" I said. "Those poor people came all the way from Auckland for an enjoyable afternoon, It was a disaster. You spoilt their trip". My ever-loving Fawlty looked me straight in the eye. "They didn't. It wasn't. I never".

A sharp encounter of another kind came in the form of Petfood Nancy, the feral goat in charge of the weed eating in the triangle. Nancy roams free. We do not have tethered, captive goats here.

Petfood Nancy came to us via Christo at Animal Control, the agency responsible for the welfare of animals in the district. Nancy was down on her luck. She had spent several weeks at the Council Pound awaiting adoption. No-one it seems, wanted a little, black feral goat that looked like a midget wilder-beast with awesome laidback horns. Nancy had suffered the indignity of being auctioned twice in the holding yard at the Pound. There were no bids. She was on her way to the Petfood Factory at Bombay, where plight becomes a shovelful of pet food, when Fate intervened.

There she stood, the only animal in the Council Pound at Buckland, waiting for another chance at a nice life. She looked so thin and forlorn. She had been waiting such a long time. Goats like travelling as a rule and Nancy was no exception. She sat happily on the rear seat of Paddy's

Toyota Corona. In the morning Nancy escaped into Garth's paddock next-door. Paddy came to help. He grabbed Nancy's horns and forced her under the fence. Bad idea. "Don't go near the goat" Paddy warns I J who is watching the goings-on from the tractor track. "Don't be silly. It likes me". Man approaches goat to pat it. Goat puts hairs up on back of neck and sniffs the ground. Man advances. Bad idea. Nasty sharp horns. Eyes of unbridled hate. "Do you feel lucky, Squire?" (from Paddy with a tinge of excitement).

"Rack off "( rude gesture from I J ). Bang. THUD.

Doctor at Waiuku Medical Centre stitches man's leg and applies bandage. Prescribes pain relief. Wife drives man home again. I phoned Maureen. "I'll bet Jerry wouldn't do a crazy thing like that".

"Life is full of surprises" she said.

# 11

## The Log-splitter

One rainy night on my way to Night Duty at Caughey Preston, I was stopped on the slippery, wet road at Glenbrook, by a person waving a torch. The newspaper clipping reads, ‘An injured motor-cyclist being helped from the road by a passer-by was struck and killed when another motorist swerved to miss his bike. He was Philip Charles Francis Dolbel(45) of Waiuku, who fell from his bike on the Glenbrook Rd around 10.25pm last night’. C P R was not successful. We never know when we will be moved to the next plateau.

Wet winters can be hazardous. Dry summers can be worse. The Franklin District Council has a Fire Ban policy that is put in place at certain times of the year, banning the lighting of fires in rural areas. The Ban is usually lifted in April, after the hot summer. During the hottest months when no fires are permitted, our rubbish pile grows and grows. Dry

branches, empty cardboard boxes, magazines, bird skeletons and other bits form a significant heap near the duck pond. One heap almost destroyed us. Without checking the wind factor, I J set it alight. Before you could say 'light me up Johnny', the sparks, carried by a strong wind, settled on the thirty-foot macrocarpa trees on the roadside, creating a spectacular blaze that could be seen for miles. We are forever grateful to the Waiuku Volunteer Fire Brigade who turned out promptly to bring the inferno under control. We have plenty of water available in case of fire. There is an unlimited supply of water from an underground spring, drawn to the house by a Davies well pump and long lines of alkathene pipe. In addition, two above ground water tanks hold rain water from the house roof and from the pavilion roof. I was glad the Fire Brigade came. I had to tell Maureen. She answered the phone with a coughing fit. Silence. Clearing the trachy tube. "What's he up to?" The whole ghastly saga unfolded. Maureen was breathing heavily. The sound of a howling dog came through the phone, slightly off-key, but totally recognisable Sinatra. "I did it mmmmyyy waaaaay".

"Is that all you can say?"

"Get rid of him".

"He needs me".

"All he needs is a dose of Rid-Rat".

Driving home from Caughey Preston one morning after the blazing inferno, I felt extremely tired. Its quite a long journey from Remuera to Waipipi; about seventy kilometres. Unplaiting my hair, I fell into bed into a deep sleep. Awake at 3pm, I staggered to the bathroom. In the mirror, staring back at me, was a very old, very grey possum with big round eyes. It was having chest pains. Seventeen years Night Duty was enough. Resignations are so hard to write.

Shortly after my retirement, Paddy designed and built a commercial log-splitter. He spent six months on the project, starting with drawings and calculations; then cutting the box section steel, welding the frame and table, fitting the hydraulics and the new 12HP Kohler engine. The whole assembly was mounted on a towable trailer with a locking device. It was envied by many of the locals. Paddy towed the log-splitter behind his truck to farms on the peninsula. He would split the firewood on site after he had felled the trees.

I will never forget the day Paddy finished building the log-splitter. I pressed the electric start switch, the engine fired, Paddy pulled the control lever and the big, silver painted monster sprang to life. The hydraulic arm descended and the blade sliced through the large macrocarpa wood block like a knife cutting through cheese. It was truly my proudest moment ever.

The log-splitter was a huge asset to the firewood business. It could split three metres of blocks every forty-five minutes.

On the evening of May 20th 1998, the log-splitter was stolen from George Douglas's timber yard on Sawmill Hill. The pain was indescribable. In spite of offering a three thousand dollar reward for information leading to its recovery, Paddy's pride and joy has never been found.

Another disappearance was Kitty's disappearance. It was during Animal Week. Our three-legged cat, didn't get on well with the other cats. He was re-homed to the far side of Auckland but decided to find his way back to Waipipi. Bob McNeill came from TV 3 to do a short segment for Animal Week. "It beats me why anyone would want to come home to this" he said into the camera, above the sound of barking dogs, for the whole of New Zealand to hear. I resolved not to do any more TV interviews. Ever.

Wally Misa found Kitty dead on the roadside opposite the Waipipi cemetery, on the evening before Paul Holmes did the funny Kitty skit on TV One with David McPhail. Kitty is buried behind our fowl-house, where he spent many happy hours on top of the corrugated iron roof, sunning himself and ignoring the old frizzle rooster Winston Megastar Putu. Wally dug the hole.

Wally Misa was a big, strong man, not unlike Ronald Reagan in appearance, with the same mellow tone of voice. Wally's pet hates were waste of any kind and using bludgers who never returned other people's tools. Millionaire Wally,

on the deeper end of seventy when he died, adored his wife Heather, a born organiser and good with money. The last time we saw Wally was on the morning after Guy Fawkes night 2005. Paddy wanted to borrow a set spanner.

Wally met us at his gateway in his Ute. Five years of chemotherapy had weakened him. He had been down to the far side of his property where his grandchildren had enjoyed the bonfire. Wally had been raking through the embers, looking for unexploded Double Happies and Tom Thumbs. He had collected a sizable pile and wanted suggestions on what to do with them.

Suggestion 1. Tear them apart and make one big cracker.  
Suggestion 2. Creep up on Heather with it. “Mighty! Too right! I’ll make a bunger and scare Heather. Yes, that’s what I’ll do”. His voice was full of schoolboy mischief. Here was a man enduring great suffering, yet determined to wring the last bit of fun out of life. Walter Leo Misa died June 22nd 2006. We miss him.

Earlier in 2002, Garth Walmsley our immediate next-door neighbour, joined the ranks of the Dear Departed. For us, the surrounding farmland, now in the care of Garth’s son Campbell, will always be known as Garth’s paddocks. Garth was a genuine ‘rарie’.I can still see him driving over the paddocks in his Ute with his farm dogs, to check the stock. Generous to a fault, one Friday at the end of the haymaking

season, Garth, a slightly older version of the film star John Candy, visited us on his farm bike. He had two bales of hay for Sugar, our Saanen milking goat. The barn was the best place to store the hay; in the far end next to the indoor winter flight aviary. The aviary had a loose door catch. On opening the outer barn door, a flash of colour came and moved swiftly through the trees behind the house. “That’s a pretty bird” said Garth. All my budgies had gone. Escaped. Not a feather left. Never to be seen again.

I missed the budgies. The corgis missed Arnold. We bought Suzy Wong to keep the corgis company. She didn’t like them. We got Monty, a black Great Dane from Dane Rescue to keep Suzy company. Monty was a lovely older Great Dane and he enjoyed his retirement with Suzy. They were like two big pussy-cats. You couldn’t see them in the dark. They patrolled the house yard and the front paddock at night with Paddy. Paddy had become unwell with an irreversible medical condition. He had sold his property and returned home to live.

Now where was I before I side-tracked onto Wally and Garth and Suzy Wong? Oh yes. Out of the blue in 1999 ,we received news from a doggie friend in Fielding, that Jedda was flying to a vet conference at Massey University. She would be coming north for a few days. We were so excited. I phoned my sister to tell her the glad tidings. She seemed unusually quiet. Later the same day, she phoned me back.

She was upset. She made me promise not to be angry. She told me that Jeddah had been to visit her , the previous day. We didn't see Jeddah. She drove past our home, direct to the airport and returned to Melbourne. Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we learn to spin.

There were no more poems or songs. There had always been poems and songs. I would phone my sister or my sister would phone me. One of us would begin to recite a poem from our schooldays. A favourite was 'The Inch Cape Rock'. I would begin. "No sound in the air. No stir in the sea" I would continue to the end of verse 9. It was my sister's turn. "DOWN went the bell, with a gurgling sound. The bubbles rose and burst around". Sometimes we did poems like 'Lochinvar'. Other times we did ' The Man From Snowy River' and 'Clancy of the Overflow' and 'The Sliprails and the Spur'. If we didn't do poems, we would sing old songs. 'Who's Sorry Now' and 'Twenty-one Years Girls is a Mighty Long Time'.

My sister would sing the final verse with gusto. "So come all you young maidens and listen to me. Never place your affection on a green willow tree. For the leaves they will wither, the roots they will die. You'll all be forsaken and you'll NEVER KNOW WHY".

The Millenium Year leaned heavily upon me. I missed my sister. I snacked all day and through the night. I began to

resemble an inflated gargoyle and I didn't care. Then Monty's leaving came. He couldn't walk. We locked Suzy Wong in the shed and fed Monty ice-cream while the deed was done. It never gets any easier. R.I.P. Lord Montgomery.

My sixtieth birthday was disconcerting. A florist delivered a basket of flowers, chocolates and wine with a card from Jeddah. I phoned the Onehunga Mall Florist for confirmation. They were very sorry, they said, but they couldn't confirm anything. The delivery docket was marked 'Confidential'. Next I phoned the Victorian Veterinary Registration Board and requested Jeddah's Melbourne telephone number. I wanted to thank her for the gift. Her file was marked 'Confidential'. They were very sorry, they said, but they couldn't divulge the information. As a last resort I contacted Telecom. "I'm sorry" said the operator. "That number is confidential". Why was I not surprised? I gave the birthday basket to my sister who is privy to Jeddah's telephone number. If I couldn't say "Thankyou", I didn't want the gift. Two-way communication wasn't possible. Paddy bought a giant sized block of Cadbury Fruit and Nut chocolate. We gorged ourselves and marvelled at the games people play.

February 15th 2001 is indelibly inscribed in our book of memories. Cousin Catherine left her mother and her four brothers and went to God with anorexia. At her birthday party, the party girl was a walking, talking skeleton. In

the end we all must die. She did it her way. (We love you, Catherine).

Easter saw us at the Awhitu School Auction. Annual school auctions are the lifeblood of country schools. There are bargains galore to be had and it affords us the opportunity to renew acquaintances with peninsula locals. Grunt was at the auction. He had been away working for the Queen. There he stood, towering over us in his leather kit, motor cycle helmet, tats and Blucher boots; chewing something in his mouth. “Hi, Pad” he said to squeaky-clean Paddy. “Hi, Pad’s mum” he said to me.

“Hi, Grunt. What brings you here?”. I licked the chilli sauce off my hot-dog. “I’ve come to buy a helmet for the wife”. Grunt is very fond of his wife and his Harley Davidson motor cycle. “How are the police treating you?”

“They leave me alone and I leave them alone” he grinned. He spat on the ground and walked in the direction of the auctioneer’s tent. He didn’t get the helmet for his wife but he bought a carved, wooden spear thingy with a metal point on the end.

# 12

## Suzy Wong

I've never had a birthday party and my birthday presents over the years have been restricted mostly to holy pictures and slippers. Happy Birthday 2001 was different. "Here's your present". Paddy shuffled his feet. Wrapping paper fell to the floor. In the box, hidden by layers of tissue paper, dressed in her satin and lace finery, was an old Armande Marseille 390 doll with real hair and brown glass eyes, just like Elladine.

Holy pictures and slippers are nice and I don't wish to seem ungrateful, but on the odd birthday, I have been known to buy myself dogs. I J does his best to conceal his surprise. "HELLO" he says."ANOTHER DOG!".

"Yes" I say, "but this one is special. He's a U K import. His sire is the Best of Breed winner from Crufts. His name is Jezalin Top Secret and he has cost moonbeams".

“Hell’s bells, woman!. You got a corgi from the U K last year!”.

“WELL EXCUSE ME FOR BREATHING”.

“They all look the bloody same”. Mutter. Mutter.

The last Bluemeadows corgi puppies were bred here in the barn at Waipipi in 1997. The first litter of tiny puppies came into our lives at our home in Greenlane in 1977. Ruby (Morag of Tibbermuir) was the proud mum of nine. “How long do you intend breeding pups?”( from I J waiting for his bedtime hug).

“Twenty years”

“Do you promise twenty years and not a minute longer?”

“I promise”.

I have seen an interesting array of puppy buyers over the years. Most are sensible people who have owned a dog before. Then there are the new owners who, after serious thought and deliberation, decide to share their lives with a non-judgemental friend. Occasionally you will get a totally unsuitable prospective owner, like the business man oozing charm, when I was the Secretary of the Dominion Welsh Corgi League. He announced that he had come for pick of the litter. Money was no object.

Having satisfied myself that he had an escape-proof property and he could provide human company during the

day for his new little friend Taffy, I was surprised to discover that he intended to tie Taffy to his wife's clothes line every afternoon to 'get him used to it'. I told him politely that you must never tie a corgi and he told me politely that it was none of my business. He said I couldn't stop him doing it and I couldn't stop him having a corgi.

I indicated, although I couldn't stop him having a corgi, I could stop him having one of mine. I suggested he drop in to Gladden's Pet Shop and buy a goldfish. He called me a paranoid bitch and a dog nutter not fit to be the Secretary of the Dominion Welsh Corgi League. I told him I had been called names by the best of them and that he didn't even come close. Secretaries know to ignore the names. You can't make it stop. He threatened to report me to the New Zealand Kennel Club. "It's a Civil matter" I said, thinking of George Mills.

Doctor John Swney the Waiuku vet, has cared for my dogs for almost twenty years. John with his skill and knowledge, is someone you can have complete faith in, always. He battled hard to save Suzy Wong. Nearing mid-day the phone call was made. John, ever dependable, ever understanding, came at once to give Suzy Wong release from her weak, failing heart.

Suzy Wong. Huge black satin dog. Seven years young. Questionable parentage. (Bull Mastiff/ Great Dane). Clever

rat catcher. Special friend of cats. Lover of doughnuts. Excellent digger of holes. Obedient fetcher of twigs, balls and Frisbees . Best confidante. No more pain. In the afternoon I drove alone to Hamilton's Gap. After an eternity, I drove to the beach at Te Toro where I walked on the sand and smashed my grief on the shell- bank. All my dogs were leaving me. Each one dearly loved. Each one deeply missed. My eyes were stinging as the words tumbled out on the shell- bank. "Jedda. Jedda". The lost years were too long. I took the note-pad from my pocket and began to write.

*Visit to Hamilton's Gap.*

*Wind whipping up delicate seaweed*

*Waves ripping up rocky foundations*

*West coast roaring bad vibrations*

*And the Taniwha bubbles foaming disapproval*

*at little blue penguins and puffer fish*

*dissolving on the sand.*

*Hard to imagine what it is like*

*to have no real beginning and no end.*

Across the shallows I saw the birds approaching. I heard the sound. The flock of seagulls settled on the sand. In their midst stood a stooped, elderly writer of books, the image of my Grandfather, Abraham Stuckey. "How intriguing" he said. "You should write a book"

“I can only do poetry”.

“Poetry will do”.

### ***Journey from the Heads***

*At the Heads the lighthouse sees the sun rise*

*Awhitu taunts Matakawa. Shy Pollok eyes*

*the open smile of Cochrane’s Gap*

*Noon laughs and throws beige coloured sand in his lap.*

*The Waiuku river flings her generous arms wide*

*Glenbrook beckons Te Toro on the ebb tide*

*Waiau beach sips the afternoon light . The boat ramp*

*tells stories , wraps cosy and settles into night.*

### ***Box Kite***

*Kindred spirits in the sky hold a pledge of something more*

*A westerly plays Rachmaninoff at the bar, whilst anchored*

*further from the shore, the box kite welcomes headland cliffs.*

*And far, far to the left shrouded in cloud, steel wings fly*

*over the Manukau, droning loud.*

*Family coming home.*

The throbbing tones mingled with the words and cradled my sadness. The healing had begun.

### **Memorial Home**

*Tottering tall on a hill, heart exposed,  
the kauri shell defrauds death of his property.  
  
Certain we are running out of time.  
  
Once proud, deliberations of neglect  
shroud the timbers in respect. Now gathering  
dreams and old boots clothed in cobwebs.  
  
Sweet William scatters round about. The dragon fly  
darts in and out .And a bumble bee lulls age  
to sleep with endless promises.*

### **Pavilion**

*Long gone beneath the rough-sawn walls  
Ambition hides.  
  
Childhood peeps above the stairs  
Laughter settles on a hawk.  
  
White Rat surveys the treasured paraphernalia  
while Tin Pig dances on his dreams  
and James Dean smiles at last.*

I looked around me. The seagulls had flown away. Rod Finlayson, the image of hard working, honest Abe Stuckey,



*Kohekohe, little white church, built 1886.*



*Shell-bank at Te Toro.*



*The old memorial home.*



*Hamilton's Gap*

was no longer there. He had returned to those gone before, transported on the beating of the wings. The shell -bank was deserted. The Hallelujah Chorus had ended. The healing was complete.

2004. We had a surprise visit from Bruce Hinton. Bruce was heavily involved with Search and Rescue for many years and he was a Supreme Winner of the Franklin Finest Person of the Year Award. He invited us to assist George Cross the wood carver, to demolish his old milking shed at Kohekohe. Paddy and I welcomed the opportunity to salvage good timber to build another shed for our collection of old farm machinery. We'd known Bruce for a long time. He had come in our gate years before and bought a Cardigan corgi puppy, a descendant of Ch. Bluemeadows Ptolemy, the sire of Ch. Barclay Krackerjack (Jedda's dog Kester). Bruce's farm dog was due to retire and he planned to teach young Bridie to help with the cows. Eventually Bridie did take over the cows and Bruce reckoned she was the best little herder he'd ever owned.

With the demolition of the milking shed complete, Bruce took us in his Land-rover, on a bumpy extended tour of his vast property. Bridie came too. Jenny, Bruce's wife stayed back at the house. We drove to the hills near the trig station and walked to the coastal cliffs overlooking the Tasman sea. Bridie went fossicking and presented us with wild deer

antlers and a possum skull. We felt privileged to be in the company of Bruce. He was a walking encyclopaedia of information pertaining to the peninsula and he spent an hour explaining a series of underground springs, king tides and Maori burial sites indicated on an old map. On the return journey we stopped at a peaceful lake to watch black swans with two cygnets. You could tell Bruce was very fond of his swans by the way he spoke about them. One elderly swan had gone missing. He thought perhaps it had gone to meet its Maker. Did I mention Bruce was big in stature like Wally Misa? And like Wally, he never complained about his failing health. Their sort never do.

We didn't see Bruce again for over a year. The last occasion was when we met outside the Amcal chemist shop in Waiuku. Paddy and I were standing chatting to Ralph Cutfield (the unofficial Mayor of Te Toro) when Bruce came out of the chemist shop. He looked awful; shrunken and pale. His intense dark eyes were watery and tired. Characteristically he shook my hand and smiled. "Its been a pleasure". He repeated the gesture to Paddy and to Ralph. We watched him shuffle across the pedestrian crossing, a broken man battling a terminal illness.

Less than a week later, like the elderly swan, Bruce Hinton left without any fuss, from a place on the farm that he loved and went to meet his Maker.

# 13

## Fire

2005. Waipipi is cold in the evenings in winter. I J goes to bed early, about 5pm. He says he is as cold as a grub. A slight exaggeration. I J is prone to exaggerate and he speaks in superlatives. Tuesday August 14 th was cold. We do our grocery shopping on Tuesdays. I drive us in my red Mitsubishi. I J doesn't drive. He had an accident. He wasn't injured but the emotional scars remain. He hasn't driven since 1992 and he blames the then Prime Minister Jim Bolger for his loss of independence. It's a long story. The gist of it is, I J had driven to the local dairy for the Herald newspaper and he was reading it while driving home. The headlines were 'Bolger's Stick-With-Us Budget'. I J's Mitsubishi left the tarseal and crashed into a ravine. The official traffic version states that he was blinded by the sun and swerved to avoid a milk-tanker.

First stop on Tuesday August 14th was the A S B bank in Waiuku. I J likes to check his bank account balance and get

a print-out. Sometimes we arrive there just before the bank opens at 9am. If the money machine is out of order, I J makes faces at the bank staff inside the bank and thumps on the window. I have spoken to the Bank Manager regarding I J's behaviour. The Bank Manager said not to worry and not to apologise; there are a lot of impatient people in Waiuku.

It was 8.57am. when we arrived at the bank. The money machine was malfunctioning. I J was unable to obtain his bank balance and his print-out. He put on his one-man sideshow to amuse the bank staff while I waited for him to return to the car. I J's eyesight is failing. I had moved the car and parked it outside the Amcal Chemist next to the bank, to save him walking back to the parking space further along, outside the Waiuku Village Butchery.

We've had words before about the difference between burgundy and maroon. My car is burgundy. Or maroon. Depending on the tilt of the sun. I J walked straight past my car with me inside watching him and tooting the horn, and he halted at a similar car parked outside the butcher shop. He went to get in the car but the woman behind the steering wheel wouldn't let him. She locked the door. He stood there, pulling at the door. I watched him. Then he banged with his clenched fist on her window. I watched him. She must have got a fright because she sped off up Queen Street.

I J doesn't like to be defeated. He did a tap dance off the footpath onto the road, cupped his hands around his mouth

and shouted “ Come back! COME BACK!”. He shouted across the street to Elton Knight “THAT’S MY WIFE!”. Everyone watched him. It can be confusing when you have a problem with your eyes. I J wandered around the town centre like a lost Bedouin until he found his way to my car. He crept alongside and quietly opened the passenger door. “What took you so long?” I asked. He eased himself into the seat.

“The blasted ASB bank”. He blamed the Government for not making the ASB bank toe the line. He blamed Kevin the Amcal chemist for having his shop where it is. I told Maureen. She was thoughtful. “You could write a book on his antics”.

“Do you mind if I include you in my book?”.

“Will it be the sanitised version?”.

“Probably not”.

“Will it air the dirty linen?”.

“A certain amount of drycleaning will be done”.

“You must not write anything libellous or out of focus”.

“My book will contain locally inspired poetry”.

“Give the lady a sherbet”.

2006. I J was managing very nicely considering his health problems. One afternoon (in May, I think) while Paddy

and I were researching the naval history of the Foudroyant battleship, on the computer in the barn, he chopped a barrow-load of firewood. My sister had phoned and we had sung ‘The Pub With No Beer’. “Oh its lonesome away from your kindred and all. Round the campfire at night, when the wild dingos call”. We sang it in harmony. Tex Morton would have been proud and so would our mother. I suppose you could say we were back to normal. Recently my sister came for a cuppa. She sat in Ratty Dianne’s rocking chair, kicked off her shoes and spread her slender toes on my mat. We listened to Paddy’s His Masters Voice gramophone churn out Helen Hayes’ monologue ‘The White Magnolia Tree’ and Carson Robison’s monologue ‘Life Gets Teejus Don’t It’. They don’t do renditions like that, any more.

Anyhow, I J had chopped his barrow-load of firewood as Paddy and I sat at the computer, engrossed in a detailed account of the Foudroyant battleship. Presently an uneasy feeling went through my bones and I knew instinctively, something was not right. “Fire! Fire!” I shouted, running towards the house. “Who? Who? Speak up. I can’t hear you” (I J through the window). “Fire! Come outside!”.

The love of my life totters onto the front lawn, shielding his eyes with his right hand and clutching a block of macrocarpa wood in his left hand. “Where? “Where? I can’t see anything”. Squints and juts his lower jaw forward to expose his dentures. Wanders into the back yard and looks in the tin garden shed.

When it was over, when the flames spewing from the top of the chimney had been extinguished, after Paddy had gone up through the manhole in the lounge room ceiling and dampened the rafters with the garden hose, after the acrid smell from the melting chimney surround had dissipated, after I had climbed up and inspected the Coloursteel roof and the ladder had been put away, I phoned Maureen. “The Kent is ruined”.

“Disappointing”

“I hate his piles of kindling. I hate the great blocks of wood he brings into the house. I hate his box of matches and I hate the way he sets everything on fire”.

“We mustn’t be unkind”.

“You’d think after almost forty-six years, he’d learn”.

Maureen was thinking. I could tell she was struggling to recall Ian McDonogh as he was, before the rot set in. “That long is it?” she croaked. “Doesn’t time fly when you are having fun”.

As I lay on my pillow in bed that night, I saw in my mind, a young David Niven. By his side was a slip of a girl aged about twenty. She could have been the film star Audrey Hepburn. Through the window the moon shimmered into view. The unmistakable voice of Archbishop Liston came to me in the darkness. “Have faith. If you have faith, you

believe and belief leads to understanding". The moon-light played tricks on the window-sill, conjuring up a bowl of boiled rice and snoring, red jelly. I reached over and pulled the blind down. "Now kiss your ring" the unmistakable voice continued "and remember you are in the state of Holy Matrimony". The memories came flooding. St Andrews Hospital on Wickham Terrace. A bunch of scatty nurses. Matron Dorothea Harrison. "I don't think you know what you're doing" she had said.

# 14

## **Barbara Frietchie**

2007 was hectic. In June I J had major heart surgery (quadruple by-pass) at Greenlane Hospital. One of the macrocarpa trees fell on the boundary fence during a bad storm in July. It took weeks to clear the mess and fix the fence. Everything seems to take longer these days. We are not as energetic as we once were and help is so expensive. On the plus side, we had enough firewood stored to last us through two winters. In November I bathed five geriatric dogs, planted a few silverbeet and visited my friend Muriel who lives in a rural area on the outskirts of Waiuku. Muriel lives alone. She has a tabby cat, numerous ducks, countless free -range fowls and four donkeys. Her front door has a cat door fitted for convenience for her cat. The fowls use it to gain access to her home in the hope of finding something to eat in the kitchen. Visiting Muriel can be exciting. Christmas came and went quietly.

I don't recall much activity in 2008. I must have been asleep. December 11th was the day of the last Webbs Auction for 2008. The inorganic rubbish collections in Franklin were discontinued several years ago, so instead of scavenging, Paddy and I attend auctions and garage sales. December 11th dawned full of expectation and sunny. We left home early to avoid traffic delays on the Southern Motorway and drove to Webbs auction rooms at Penrose in Auckland.

There was a large crowd and the auction began on time at 9.30am. James, the Webbs auctioneer was in full cry. Paddy instructed me to record the auction prices of the items as the auction progressed. It wasn't easy. My fingers got cramp. My bottom went numb. I tried to stand. I got squashed between two frenzied bidders. I couldn't see what was going on. My notebook fell to the floor. I couldn't pick it up. How would I remember the prices of the last four items? My mind wandered. I wrote 'Don't Forget' up my arm in Biro.

Then I spied Ratty Dianne. She is a regular at Webbs auctions. She was sitting on the opposite side of the showroom and she was knitting as usual. I gave her a little wave and a smile. I was the winner of Lot 39 whatever it was. Paddy dropped his head on his chest. You'd think he'd been shot. "Gimme the card" he snapped. "Gimme the card!". He bid on a 1936 Cathedral valve radio, The Book of the Dead and a pair of Victorian binoculars in a box with three old cameras.

I J was waiting impatiently at the gate when we arrived home. “And here comes another load of incredible crap” he announced, attempting to deflate us. We ignored him. He helped us unload the car, enthusing over our great bargains, including Lot 39 which happened to be a box of plastic cups and two saucers. I looked at my arm. There was Biro writing on it. The significance of the writing had gone.

Christmas Day 2008 was a joyful affair. My sister came with Charlie, her little Chihuahua, for Christmas dinner. We carried our plates over to the picnic table in the centre paddock and we ate in the shade under the trees. Cars full of holiday-makers trailing bits of tinsel and balloons drove past, on their way to the beaches. The dogs had chicken and roast vegetables for Christmas dinner. They have the same meal every year. Charlie spent the afternoon barking at the new fern in my pot-plant stand. In the evening we phoned my brother Trevor in Brisbane to wish him the compliments of the season.

January 2009 went un-noticed. I broke my New Year’s Resolution in February. What does it matter if I choke on chocolate raisins and Cherry Ripes? I am so lucky. My life has been almost perfect. In March I J and I finalised our Wills with one of the Waiuku solicitors. We mentioned our long lost daughter in Australia. She has spent many years there, ‘being true’ to herself. What’s-his-name nodded his head the way solicitors do. “I’ve seen it all before” he

declared. For a moment he could have been Rumpole of the Bailey. He has a warm, friendly manner. He makes us feel comfortable and secure. So here we sit in the hub of Waipipi, amongst the rich and shameless, without a care in the world.

My sister came for lunch today. Lunch over, we sat in the lounge-room with I J and Bobby Magee and the corgis. We discussed the day's news in the Herald. There was lots of stimulating conversation. I J goes quiet about 3pm and falls asleep in his comfortable chair in the corner. Today was no exception. My sister says everyone is entitled to live their life how they wish. I agree.

I made herbal tea directly and we two girls launched into our pastime of reciting poems from our schooldays. We did 'The Village Blacksmith' 'The Sky Lark', 'North East by North' and we would have done 'Barbara Frietchie' except it was four o'clock and time for my sister to go home. She levered herself out of Ratty Dianne's rocking chair and stretched her arms towards the ceiling. When you get to our age, you need a good stretch to get the circulation going again. His sister-in-law having departed, I J roused himself. "Are you finished?" he enquired. "Are you finished with the poetry? Has the fatted calf gone?". Lately he has been referring to my sister as 'the fatted calf' or 'the sacrificial lamb'. He speaks in biblical terms. Its hard to fathom his meaning. "What would you know?" I challenged him. "You

would not recognise a fatted calf if it fell from the sky and sat on your lap. Do tell me, when could you recite even the first verse of John Greenleaf Whittier's 'Barbara Frietchie'?"

I J hauled his eighty years from his chair, bowed and stepped up onto the brown battered bean bag. The afternoon sun slipped through the Krestas and toyed with the tufts of hair on his neck. The years fell away to reveal a much younger man. He looked me straight in the eye and my heart began to beat faster. "Barbara Frietchie". He spoke in a deep passionate voice. There was a pause. Then he delivered the coup de grâce.

"Up from the meadows rich with corn,  
Clear in the cool September morn,  
The clustered spires of Frederick stand  
Green-walled by the hills of Maryland.

Non omnis morior. We do not wholly die".

Bobby Magee smiled at the corgis. I J went to find his left slipper. And Abe Stuckey winked his approval from the old oval portrait in the heavy oak frame with the concave glass, hanging on the lounge-room wall.

# The End



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